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In Colonial Days.

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IN COLONIAL DAYS:

A TALE OF

RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS.

BY

L. M. N.

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In Colonial Days.

CHAPTER I.

A WINTER EVENING AT THE FYTHE FARM.

A COLD, gusty November evening, in 1769, was closing in foggy darkness over the old forests and the scanty clearings of Providence Plantations. Lights twinkled in the windows of the gabled houses in the town of Providence, and cast flickering brightness into the narrow streets; but in the surrounding country, where the evening work was done, and tired farmers had closed heavy wooden shutters, and drawn up old arm-chairs, or wooden settles, before the logs blazing on the andirons in the wide chimney place, the dreary winter night held undisputed sway over the outer world. The shrill whistling of the wind, and the creak of leafless boughs, as a fiercer gust than usual shook their branches, was mingled with the occasional cry of a wild-cat, or the howl of a hungry wolf.

About three miles out of the town stood an old farmhouse, partly sheltered by the slope of a hill from

the full fury of the blast, that nevertheless made strange music in the throat of its wide chimney.

This farm had been originally the property of old Reuben Fythe, and was at one time an estate of large extent; but the family had dwindled down, and the land was gradually sold. At last the old man died, and the home lot was purchased by a gay young Englishman, Harvey Rodman, who came to settle there with a pretty young bride, of one of the old Puritan families in the neighboring colony of Massachusetts.

But Harvey Rodman's name never clung to the old place. He died about two years after; and it must be confessed that the neighbors pitied the poor little widow far more than they regretted him.

When, after a struggling existence of four years, during which the farm went down sadly for lack of good, steady management, Elder Ebenezer Fythe, the half-brother of Reuben, returned to Providence, the gossips were not long in discovering that the grave and kindly man took a special interest in the little widow at the old homestead. And the marriage that followed received the approbation of the sober-minded part of the community. All this happened more than thirty years ago; and both husband and wife have long since closed their eyes on the trials and joys of life, in this strange old world that is ever new.

In their accustomed seats by the wide chimney-

place, on this blustering night, sit two women, the only remaining representatives of the name of Fythe. Indeed, the widow's cap, closely covering her dark hair, betokens that the elder of the two no longer bears that name; and both the cap, and the grave, quiet features, give her an older expression than the upright figure, the clear, unwrinkled complexion, and the smooth bands of hair, as yet entirely unstreaked with grey, would justify.

Her younger companion is a slender, graceful maiden, with a fair, delicate complexion and shapely features. The varying color, that flushed and faded, and the changeable grey eyes, that at times dilated and grew singularly dark and dreamy, betrayed a sensitive temperament, concealed under manners and speech almost as quiet as those of the older woman. In features and complexion the two are not alike; but there is that inexplicable resemblance, called a family likeness; and in fact they are sisters, although there is actually a difference of ten years in their ages. This difference has seemed even greater since the sudden death of Dorothy's husband, Abel Seaton, which happened three years ago, and took all traces of girlish brightness out of her naturally reserved and quiet face. Mercy's shrinking timidity made her at times seem much younger than her age of twenty-two, and it was not really very surprising that

strangers had occasionally spoken to Reuben—Dorothy's only child, a bright-faced boy of fourteen—of his "sister Mercy." This evening, however, the difference was not so marked; for both women looked anxious and thoughtful.

"I fear me that Reuben will only lose a day on the wharf to-morrow," said Dorothy, as she laid down a letter, which had evidently traveled far and been much read.

"Mr. John Brown expected that one of his ships, which was to leave London on the same day, would be in last week," replied Mercy; "so it will not be strange if they do arrive to-morrow."

"Well, Cudjo can do the work without Reuben's help. Yet I would that I knew whether to expect them or not, for it is needless expense to have Keelah here before Nathanael and his wife really come," said Dorothy. "In truth, it seems to me, if the child be seven years old, she should hardly need a nurse."

"But, think you not, Sister Dorothy, that may-be Mrs. Rodman is a fine lady, and but little used to work, as we have ever been taught to do?" asked Mercy, anxiously. "In good truth, though I would gladly see our brother, of whom our dear mother always spoke so tenderly, I am foolishly fearful of his lady wife."

"Nonsense, child," replied Dorothy, gravely. "Fine lady or not, she ought to be able to dress and care for her own child, when it is a little wench of seven summers. In good truth, I believe the wisest way is to give ourselves no trouble concerning Keelah. If they come to-morrow, we will do our best to make them comfortable."

She then took up her knitting and worked steadily for a few seconds, while her sister sat gazing into the fire. At last Mercy asked, rather timidly:

"Dorothy, do you know aught of our mother's first husband? Think you that Nathanael is like his father?"

"God forbid!" said Dorothy, quickly; then her cheek reddened a little, she paused in her knitting, and seemed for a moment to be undecided whether to say more.

"Mercy," she said at last, turning to her sister, who was watching her in anxious suspense, "it is best, as our dear father used to say, to let the faults of the dead rest in their graves; but since Nathanael is coming hither at last, after all these years, it is perhaps well that you should know somewhat of his father. Harvey Rodman died in a drunken brawl when Nathanael was but little more than a year old. The shame and grief nearly crushed our mother's life."

"Oh, Dorothy," exclaimed Mercy, in awed tones, "how was that possible? Our mother was so sweet and godly."

"Aye, truly," replied Dorothy, "it seems passing strange to us, who knew only her peaceful, happy life with our sainted father. My husband told me the sad story, and I had already heard some words on the subject drop from our mother's lips, though she could never speak much on it."

"Does Nathanael know of this?" asked Mercy.

"He can hardly be ignorant of it; for all these years that he has been in England he has been living, as you know, with his grandfather. And old Sir Peter Rodman, if report spoke truly, could have forgiven the drunkenness and the brawling far more readily than he could forgive his son's marriage with a Puritan maiden of godly parentage. It was a sore anxiety and sorrow to our mother that her only son should be under such training," said Dorothy.

"Then why was he not made to tarry here? I would never have let him go," exclaimed Mercy, in low tones, but with a sort of repressed energy, that sometimes showed itself in curious contrast with her usual gentle timidity.

"You may read these letters that I found in our mother's work-box," replied Dorothy. As she spoke, she raised the lid of a large, square work-box that

rtood on the table near her. It was curiously fashioned, with a kind of well in the centre, and around this a tray containing small partitions for reels, thimble, wax, and other materials for sewing. When the tray was lifted, it disclosed a goodly space below, in which small pieces of work could be stowed away. But the well in the centre, which was the whole depth of the box, and was closed with a separate lid, had evidently been used as a receptacle for private papers. Dorothy drew out a pin that fastened down the cover of this well, and from several worn and yellowed papers she chose out two letters, which she handed to Mercy.

The first was directed to Mrs. Elizabeth Rodman. The writing was crabbed, but Mercy drew nearer to the candle, and made out that it was from old Sir Peter Rodman, of Rodmanhurst, Sussex, England, dated 1739. It contained, in rather curt phraseology, an invitation to his son's widow and child to visit him in England, and gave also the information of the death of Harvey Rodman's elder brother. The second letter was addressed to the Reverend Ebenezer Fythe. And if the former letter was curt, this one was even more unpleasant, for the elaborately polite sentences seemed to conceal a sneer.

"I do not understand this," said Mercy. "Of what letter does he speak?"

"It is clear, I think, that our father had written in answer to the first letter, which, you perceive, is dated four years after our mother's second marriage. And it is also clear that he must have informed Sir Peter that our mother was no longer a widow, and that he would be a father to her fatherless son; for you see that this offer is rejected, and that Sir Peter wishes Nathanael to be sent to him. Abel told me it was said among the neighbors that Nathanael was as good as heir to a fine estate in England, and that, therefore, our father and mother thought it would be wrong to refuse the request of the childless old man. But Abel said, and I am sure he was right, that it was more the fear of breeding dislike and dissension between those so near of kin as Nathanael and his grandfather, than any desire for worldly gain, which made them at length agreee to part with the boy.

"In that case, how is it that Nathanael is returning hither when his grandfather is dead? Has he sold the estate?" asked Mercy.

"Nay, nay, child, he never had it," replied Dorothy, with a slight, sad smile. "There was his Cousin Rupert, the child of Sir Peter's oldest son; he was but a puny babe, I have heard our mother say. But as he grew older, and showed a good intention to live and inherit the property, I fancy that Sir Peter would have been not ill-pleased if Nathanael had

remained in Providence Plantations. Be that as it may, you see Nathanael's letter tells us that the poor old man is dead. Rupert has the property now, and things are not pleasant for Nathanael and his wife. They are therefore minded to come to us; so we have but to make them welcome, for our mother's sake."

"Aye, Dorothy, that we will," replied Mercy, heartily; "and a little for his own too, is it not? Can you remember him?"

"Yes and no, child. I have but a faint notion of a big, grave, kindly brother, who used to carry me about and play with me; but as I was only a babe of three years old when he left the colony at the age of ten, it is more likely that our mother's talk of him has kept up my childish impression than that I really remember him."

There was a slight pause, while the knitting-needles clicked and the fire crackled cheerily. Then Mercy asked, in a troubled voice:

"Sister Dorothy, think you that Mrs. Rodman will be one of those who care not for all those things that we hold most precious?"

"In truth, I know not, child," replied Dorothy. "After our dear mother's death, Nathanael wrote but twice to our father, though I well know that father ever felt a yearning tenderness toward him, almost as if he had been really his own son. In truth, father

wrote to him about the time when his Cousin Rupert would come of age, to ask if he was minded to return to his old home, where a warm welcome awaited him."

"Did he answer that?" asked Mercy. "I knew naught of it."

"Nay, thou wert but a child," said Dorothy, in her motherly tones. "It must have been nearly nine years ago, for I mind well that I had but just breeched Reuben a short time before father wrote; and the lad was so wild and masterful, that he had nearly worn through the cloth, and I was spinning the wool for a new web when Nathanael's answer came."

"What said he?" interrupted Mercy, eagerly. Her mind was so taken up with this new brother and sister, and the little niece from over the sea, that she was even a little impatient concerning Reuben's breeches, though she had herself helped in the spinning.

"He said that he could not come; that he expected soon to take to himself a wife; and, if I mistake not, he was already settled as vicar, or rector, of the church near Rodmanhurst."

"Oh, I knew not that she was a minister's wife," said Mercy, in relieved tones; "then surely they will both feel at home in a minister's family."

Dorothy made no reply, but as she rose to snuff

the candle, she mentally recalled how her father had shaken his head, and the almost stern look which his kindly, venerable face had worn, as he murmured when he read that letter:

"Blind leaders of the blind! What else can it be when this living is given to him as a sop, because he has lost the estate. It grieves me sorely that the lad ever left us."

Dorothy, however, had no wish to prejudice her young sister against her new relations; and also she and her father had always jealously guarded the gentle, loving little maiden, as far as possible, from the knowledge of the strange mixture of evil with the holiest things in this world. To Mercy's simple, guileless mind, good things were always good, and bad always bad. She knew little of the tares that the devil mingles with the wheat; and she went to her peaceful slumbers that night with bright anticipations of the coming of the minister's family.

CHAPTER II.

MISTRESS SOPHY RODMAN.

THE old home comes back to me as if I had seen it but yesterday. There is my mother's chair, and the work-box. Dorothy, it always stood in the window, beside her, as I remember."

"Aye, and it would be there now, Nathanael, were it not that I moved it yesternight, to read a few old letters it contained," said Dorothy, as she lifted the large box, and moved towards the window, where a tall and strongly built man stood by the old arm-chair, his hands resting on its straight back with gentle touch, almost as if it had been a thing of life.

He advanced as Dorothy spoke, took the heavy box from her hands, and placed it on the window seat. It was an almost involuntary action for Nathanael Rodman to take from a lady's hands anything that seemed too large or too weighty for her to carry. But it was a double surprise to Dorothy, who had always been the active, capable daughter, wife, and mother, caring for others more than she cared for herself, to have this slight burden carried for her, and then to see this stranger—in whose bronzed and thought-lined face

she had vainly tried to catch some faint resemblance that would awaken her childish memory of him—place the old work-box exactly as she had seen her mother place it in the window seat.

This little link with the past gave her what she had been seeking, and she felt at home with him at once. She was not demonstrative; she only laid her hand beside his, that again rested on the old chair, and said:

"Brother, you remember well."

A sort of cloud or shadow seemed to lift from Nathanael's face. In the bustle of their arrival that morning, when the two horses had come cantering up the road—Reuben, with Mistress Sophy Rodman mounted behind him on his mother's pillion, that he had taken in for her use when he went into the town at daybreak, and Nathanael, with his little daughter Penelope wrapped in his cloak, and seated before him, —there had been hearty greetings and an outspoken welcome; but it was strangers with strangers. Now, when Mercy had gone with Penelope to their chamber, and Reuben was off to the barn, looking to the horses and aiding old Cudjo, these two, who alone were closely linked with the past, had felt the restraint that follows when sad memories are awakened by a stranger. But Nathanael's action and Dorothy's simple words broke down the barrier. He saw

again before him the little toddler, who would say, "Brother," though the name Nathanael was too much for her tiny lips; and he turned, with a frank glow of pleasure in his eyes, and took both her hands.

"I can see her very features in you, Dorothy," he said.

"Aye, but Mercy has the manners and complexion," replied Dorothy, pleased with his words, but escaping with a little shamefacedness, as was her wont when the conversation turned on herself. "She is a sweet and gracious child, brother."

"Aye, and passing fair too," replied Nathanael. "I hope that she and my little Sophy will take kindly to each other."

For a moment Dorothy was a little puzzled, thinking that her brother had meant to say his daughter's name. Mistress Sophy Rodman was a bright, lively, self-possessed little brunette, whose masterful little ways, though pretty and graceful enough, had not seemed to Dorothy, in the short glimpse she had as yet had of her, by any means to call for such a protectingly pitying tone. But she was soon to learn that Nathanael's was the nature that makes a man pre-eminently a protector to those whom he loves; and the fact that his merry little wife was nearly fifteen years younger than himself, made him singularly compliant to her slightest whims, and

always eager to please her. It was not that he feared to lose her affection, though, in truth, he hardly knew what unbounded reverence and regard for him lay deep in the loyal little heart that ever beat true beneath all her whimseys and frivolities; but at times he feared lest he should grow too old and unsympathetic for the bright little creature he had won. All this, however, could not be read at a glance, even by Dorothy's observant eyes; and she was well satisfied to rest content with the discovery of a true-hearted, loving son of her dear mother.

The sound of voices on the stairs put a stop to any farther conversation between the two; but Dorothy went off to her hospitable housewifely cares with a lighter heart.

As for Mercy, she hardly knew as yet whether she was pleased or not with her new relations. Her ideas of the natural laws of life, and the universal fitness of things, had received a rude shock when she first set eyes on her new sister-in-law. It was not that Mistress Sophy did or said anything amiss; but the gay little knots of ribbons, and the piled up curls, that added several inches to her rather diminutive stature, made her look much grander than either Mercy or Dorothy, although they had donned their best gowns to do honor to their guests; and Mistress Sophy's boxes were not yet brought away from the

wharf where the vessel was slowly unloading. Her merry chatter also sounded very like a good-hearted, rather petulant child, ready to scold with a smile, and to laugh with a little pout. All this would have agreed very well with Mercy's first expectation of a fine lady; but such a "minister's wife" was utterly bewildering to the simple imaginings of the minister's daughter.

"I know I look a fright, a perfect fright," said the little dame, dolefully, as she raised herself on her tip-toes before the small looking-glass, perched on the top of a high chest of drawers. "I told Nathanael that I positively must get those boxes, for I should really die of shame to present myself before you in such a plight. But, dear me, he could not get them. What with all this talk about duties and imports, and rights of the colonies and Parliamentary usurpations, who knows but they will whisk off my bonnet-box to their strong rooms and lock it up, lest perchance it contain a chest of tea?"

"Tea in your bonnet-box!" exclaimed Mercy, in bewilderment.

"Mamma is only talking in pleasantry, Aunt Mercy," said a childish voice at her elbow; and Mercy started and looked down at the little girl, who had scarcely spoken before, who now stood watching her gravely with a pair of big, dark eyes.

"Hold your tongue, Miss Malapert," said her mother, playfully shaking her finger at the child. "A doleful kind of pleasantry, truly, that keeps a poor storm-tossed gentlewoman from getting her fresh gowns and head-gear, when at last she arrives in port after all those weeks of misery. Is it not so, Mistress Fythe?"

"Oh, call me Mercy!" exclaimed the younger woman, reddening through her fair skin.

"Thank you, sweetheart, that I will, if you will call me Sophy," replied the little matron, stopping in her work of adjusting her cap on the dark curls, while she laid her hands on Mercy's shoulders and imprinted a dainty kiss first on one, then on the other of the pink cheeks. "It is good of you to be so friendly to me. I assure you I felt very shy about coming in this sudden way among Nathanael's relations."

Mercy was still more bewildered to hear this self-possessed lady talk so easily of her shyness and look so much at her ease, while she herself felt painfully certain that shyness and embarrassment showed in every feature and in every word she spoke, though it would have choked her to attempt to confess it.

She took refuge in the subject of the boxes, and remarked as re-assuringly as she could:

"I am sure you will not have to wait long for your

gowns. Mr. John Brown is a good friend to us, and I know he will try to get these boxes for you without overmuch delay. But all those taxes and imposts that have been so unjustly put upon us cause endless troubles, and right-minded men say that the only safety lies in our agreement that certain of these taxed goods shall not be imported. If the captain of your vessel has tried to bring in any such, it will surely cause him much trouble and no gain."

"How know you all this? and wherefore should you trouble your pretty head with such dull matters as taxes and Parliament business?" cried Sophy, raising her eyebrows with a comical look of distress. "I thought myself very knowing, in that I had picked up sundry phrases that were always being bandied at the ship's table among such wise heads as Nathanael consorted with; and here I find a pretty maiden in her teens ready to take up the thread of their discourse."

"It would be strange, truly, if we cared naught for what is just and what is unjust," replied Mercy, a little proudly, her shyness giving way as the subject was spoken of which lay so much on the heart and thoughts of every colonist. "Have we not heard what was done in Boston last March, when the King's troops were sent there, and the Romney impressed New England seamen and took the sloop Liberty,

under the pretext that she was engaged in smuggling? There was rioting then; and Mr. Brown says there will be worse ere the men of Rhode Island will submit to have their freedom wrested from them. Saw you not the great elm in front of Olney's Tavern, in Providence? Surely Reuben will not have missed to point it out to you? It is bare enough now; but I saw it last June when it was a mass of tender green, and the people assembled to dedicate it as the Liberty Tree."

"You set great store by your liberty, methinks," said Sophy, looking rather curiously at the young maiden, whose timidity seemed to have all vanished, while her cheeks glowed and her eyes grew dark with the earnestness of her speech. "Prithee, do the very babes in this new country lisp weighty matters of state, and study rates of imports and laws of commerce, instead of their tales of Robin Goodfellow and Queen Mab?"

"Are there any babes here, Aunt Mercy?" broke in the same little voice at her elbow; but this time in pleading, wistful tones. "I would that I could play with them. There were some on the ship, and I cried one night for Barbara and little Peter."

"Nonsense, silly child, thou art ever thinking of those naughty children, who care little for thee, and who would take the bread out of our mouths, if their

father and mother had not done it already," said Mistress Rodman, pettishly. "Thy Aunt Mercy will think thou hast no more manners and breeding than one of the native Indians, if thou pratest thus when thou art not spoken to."

Mercy was quick-witted enough to guess that the children named were Penelope's little cousins, the children of Sir Rupert, the new master of Rodmanhurst; but she was greatly shocked that such thoughts should be put into the mind of a child of tender years. She held out her arms to the little girl, saying, kindly:

"Doubtless, we shall find some little ones to play with thee, sweetheart; and now come with me and we will see if thy Aunt Dorothy hath not a sweet cake for thee."

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

THE two sisters soon found that their new relations fitted into their places in the little household without any such terrible reversal of their usual order of life as they had feared.

Little Penelope, far from requiring a nurse, was herself a very useful little personage. She trotted about the house in her aunt Dorothy's train, and, in her grave, reserved little way, showed great delight in all the housekeeping details, that were entirely new to her. While her mother, if not very useful, was at least "not upsetting," as Dorothy remarked to Mercy. She was quite content to take up with new ways; and her brightness, and ready wit in making pleasant and appropriate little speeches, went far to win her a place in the hearts of these simple and well-disposed gentlewomen. As for Reuben, he was devoted to her from the very first hour that she entered the house; and it was well that Nathanael was there to take some oversight of farm matters, for Reuben's head was "not worth shucks for 'membering," as old

Cudjo remarked to Nathanael, and so everything came on Mistress Seaton.

"Ole massa, he knew more 'bout preachin' than plantin' 'taters; and after ole missus died, 'peared as if he hadn't much hold on this warl' nohow. Then Massa Seaton, he took hold and brought up the ole place right smart, he did, till he got that fall outer the hay cart. Then young missus, she done all she knowed how; but a place don't get on widout a massa. It don't stan' to reason as it should," said old Cudjo, shaking his head solemnly.

He had been bought by Mr. Fythe nearly thirty years before, and he spoke his mind with the privileged freedom of an old slave who had been long under the kindly rule of good masters.

Dorothy confirmed what Cudjo said when Nathanael began to speak of his plans, and she added:

"Let be for the present, brother. If you are minded to turn to farming, you cannot begin before spring. Stay here, and take time to look about you."

Old Sir Peter had felt some twinges of conscience concerning this fine young grandson whom he had kept hanging idly about Rodmanhurst after his college days were over, merely because he feared that the peevish, weakly Rupert would never live to inherit the property. When it appeared, however, that Rupert not only attained to man's estate, but

actually took a wife, who presented him with a young heir, Sir Peter tried to atone to Nathanael in a fashion of his own, by giving him the living of Rodmanhurst, which the young man accepted simply because it gave him a living, and the vicarage enabled him to offer a home to his bride. When the old man died, his will showed that he had left to Nathanael what he could of ready money; the estate was, of course, entailed on Rupert. This disposal of the ready money made Rupert very cross, and it also gave Nathanael a means of escape from a thralldom that was growing every day more irksome to him.

He now agreed to Dorothy's proposal, that the family should remain together until the spring, on condition that he should pay the usual board and lodging bills. Dorothy at first demurred to this; but when Nathanael said, "If you don't want it now, lay it by for Reuben's schooling; the lad is quick and bright, and should have opportunities," he struck the right chord.

When the full account of the first Commencement of the Rhode Island College at Warren, on September seventh, had appeared in the "Providence Gazette and Country Journal" two months before, Dorothy had read the names of the seven young men who had received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a secret longing that, one day, her Reuben's name should

figure in the same manner; and now that there was so much talk of bringing the College to Providence, close by to their home, she was more than ever eager to see this hope fulfilled.

"It shall be as you say, brother," she replied, with something very like tears shining in the grave and steady eyes. "Since the day of his birth it has been my wish to see the lad following in the footsteps of my blessed father; and it was his own father's desire that our son should be given to the Lord. But we wished him to have good scholarship. My father, who had but small chance for learning, ever said that an uneducated minister was as an ill-fitted-out workman, no matter how strong his zeal."

Nathanael had dropped the prefix reverend from his name when he left Rodmanhurst; and so strong in him was the feeling of repulsion from enforced religious duty, that he had much ado not to push away the book when Dorothy laid the Bible beside him, for evening prayers, on the first evening after their arrival. The next day, when he went to town to see after the boxes, he even purposely loitered until the supper hour, and the evening prayer that immediately followed, would be over. But something in Dorothy's simple, earnest longing that her son should be dedicated to the service of the Lord struck him with a feeling of contrite shame. He only said, gently:

"Have a care, Dorothy. It is ill-work making plans for a lad of his years. Force him not against his inclination."

"Force him! Nay, brother; if he thinks it not the highest and the happiest calling, I would rather he spent his days in pegging old boots."

She suddenly remembered that she knew nothing of her brother's views concerning his own life, and she held her peace, fearing lest she might have seemed to cast reflections on him; but he answered, quietly:

"You are quite right, Dorothy, as I have reason to know. After paying for our meat and lodging with my Sunday sermon, I never wanted to open the Bible again till the next Saturday night. I should have been better pegging boots."

"My father thought that it was so," replied Dorothy; "and it gave him a sore heart when your letter came."

"I thought the tidings would have pleased him," said Nathanael, surprised. "I know that I said naught of scruples, for I would not grieve him."

"It was not what you said that grieved him, but what you left unsaid," answered Dorothy. "Think you, that a man whose heart was in the work of the Lord would write of such a matter as coldly as if he were detailing the purchase of a new coat?"

Nathanael said nothing; but the discovery that he

had come among people who dared to look below the surface, and who were not to be satisfied with a mere veneering of propriety, was not displeasing to him. That evening, instead of apparently forgetting all about evening worship until the Bible was laid beside him, he rose himself to fetch it as soon as the cloth was removed. Mistress Sophy looked on in surprise; and when they had gone to their room, she remarked:

"I thought these daily devotions would have annoyed you, Nathanael; and I was planning to persuade our kind sisters to let each one say prayers in private."

"I beg of you, Sophy, do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Nathanael, quickly. "You do not understand what this religion is to them."

"No?" questioned Sophy, raising her pretty eyebrows and looking curiously at her husband. Then, as he said no more, she remarked, placidly: "My thought was only to save you from being wearied; but I will be as discreet and silent as the hills. In good truth, I like it myself, as I like everything in this strange, new country."

Mistress Sophy, in her universal contentment with all the ways of her new relations, showed a great deal of wisdom, for the result was that they looked with indulgent toleration on all her ways; and when she began to make acquaintance among the neighbors, and

to feel somewhat at home in her new surroundings, she found no one much inclined to find fault, or to thwart her in the carrying out of her own will. The little lady evidently liked gayety and fine clothes; but, as she neither powdered her hair nor put patches on her face, Dorothy only smiled a little sadly at the youthful folly of bright bows and dainty caps. The gayeties were all of a quiet, sober kind; and Dorothy never made any objections if Reuben wanted the pillion on the old nag to ride with his aunt Sophy to town, or if more frequent invitations than she cared to accept came in from their country neighbors, and from their friends in the town.

She appreciated the kind intention to do honor to her brother and his wife, but Dorothy cared little now for social gatherings; and it soon came to be a settled arrangement that she would stay in the house with the little Penelope, who was sent to bed every night as regularly as the cuckoo clock chimed seven. In truth, Penelope had a notion of her own, that the hour of bedtime was in some occult way regulated by the years of one's life; and she secretly entertained a hope and strong conviction, that when she was eight years old, she would be allowed to sit up till eight o'clock. Whether at the age of twelve, she would reach to that fearful midnight hour which figured so largely in the tales her old nurse used to tell her in

England, when the clock striking twelve was a signal for the appearance of the ghosts, was not yet clear to her mind. As her desire to sit up till twelve o'clock and take the risk of a meeting with the said ghosts was strongest in the broad daylight, and gradually waned as the twilight faded, she was content to leave that question to be settled in the future.

Nathanael cared as little as Dorothy for any gayeties; but he was glad to meet with his neighbors and to renew some of his boyhood's friendships; and he sought anxiously for information concerning the dark clouds that were evidently rising on the political horizon. Thus, in the social gatherings in Providence, while Sophy was the centre of a merry circle of young people, her husband would be found in deep discourse with such men as the four brothers, John, Joseph, Nicholas, and Moses Brown, over the newest tidings from Boston or New York, concerning the billeting of British troops on the colonists, now that the war was over and their presence in large numbers was surely entirely unnecessary; or, again, concerning the latest acts of the British Government with regard to taxes and restrictions laid on commerce. Nathanael had, of course, heard these questions relating to the government of the colonies much discussed in England, but it was as a new revelation to him to hear the same matters talked over where

the effects were plainly visible. The Acts of Parliament, decreeing that the colonies must receive tea, glass, woolen goods, and various other articles from the mother country, and pay on them a certain fixed rate of import duty, appeared in a very different light when, instead of merely reading them over at the vicarage breakfast-table, he found himself seated at a table where tea was no longer used, because his host was one of those colonists who held firmly to the charter granted by King Charles II. to Rhode Island, by which the colonists were given the right of being governed by their own Assembly in the article of taxes and internal police. He read of the Commencement of the Rhode Island College at Warren, where all the graduates and the President were dressed entirely in garments of American manufacture; and he saw his own sister, scarce six months after her husband's death, wearing no black crape or mourning apparel, because such articles could only be obtained from England, and by paying the import duties; which duties the colonists stoutly maintained to be unjust; since they had had no voice in the imposition of them. All these things caused Nathanael to think deeply; and it was little wonder that his own sturdy love of free play roused him to even greater indignation than his friends expressed, because this was all so new to him.

The non-importation agreement had just been indefinitely prolonged by the Providence merchants. A few individuals had delayed about signing the agreement; but the majority were firm in their determination to stand by New York and the other colonies; and four meetings had been held within two weeks, with the result that all the merchants had agreed concerning the import trade.

The vessel in which Nathanael and his little family had come over, had brought goods contrary to this agreement, and they were handed over to a committee, to be stored until the repeal of the Townshend Act should lift the heavy and unjust burden of taxation.

Amid all this eager excitement, caused by a burning sense of the injustice of these attempts to wrest from the colonists that liberty for the sake of which their ancestors had braved the perils and trials of a new and savage country, and in daily contact with men animated by this spirit, it was not surprising that Nathanael could hardly settle to quiet farm life. He longed to see and hear more of the working of these vexed questions; and finally he decided to make the trip to Boston, while the winter snows still lay heavy on the roads.

"When the spring thaw comes on, the roads will be almost impassable," he said, in answer to Sophy's

remonstrance; "and when the milder weather begins, there will be farm work to think of and our own plans to settle. So there is undoubtedly no time like the present."

Dorothy agreed with him in this; and she lamented that he would not have the opportunity to see at this time the Reverend Hezekiah Smith, as he was absent from home.

"My father ever esteemed him a young man of good parts; and his godly conversation is like running water to the thirsty soul. He would give you a warm welcome at Haverhill, were he at home now; but he is absent in the Southern governments. He had been appointed to collect money in them to the founding of our college building," she said, and her grave eyes had the earnest light that always shone in them when she mentioned the new college, though her hopes and plans were spoken of to none since the day she had confided them to Nathanael.

Thus it came about that Nathanael was away in Boston at the time when the final decision as to the future home of the new college was reached. The contest had been close between Newport and Providence; and it had been found a delicate matter to judge between the towns that desired this honor. Finally it was announced that the preference would be given to the one subscribing the largest sum

towards the enterprise. At the meeting, in February, it was found that Providence had contributed four thousand two hundred and eighty pounds, the largest sum given unconditionally, and it had also other advantages; thus the proud distinction was awarded to her, of being the seat of this new seminary of learning, the first in the new country to be mainly under Baptist control.

Great were the rejoicings in the town; and in the country, such an event must not be allowed to pass without being duly honored. Old Mrs. Truefitt, the nearest neighbor to the Fythes, who had not been out of doors since the beginning of the new year, was tempted by an afternoon of clear winter sunshine and this choice piece of news, left at her door by a neighbor who had ridden out from Providence, to walk over to the old Fythe House and see the "girls," as she still called the widow and her sister.

Mrs. Truefitt and her piece of news were very kindly received, and as Dorothy's hospitality would have been put sorely to the blush had her guest gone home before supper, it was settled that Reuben should take her home by moonlight in the sledge. The bare mention of the moonlight drive set Mistress Sophy's bright eyes dancing, and she had quietly whispered to Reuben to make room for Mercy and herself before Mrs. Truefitt's reluctance to stay was fully overcome.

The good lady was then ushered up-stairs and her bonnet and shawl deposited in the best bedroom, while, from a basket that she carried with her, a portentous cap was carefully extracted and placed on her head.

"Mamma, if she meant only to run in for a minute, why did she bring her cap?" whispered Penelope.

"Silly child, why do people always tell fibs?" retorted her mother, too well pleased with the novelty in store for her to pay much heed to the child; and Penelope retired to her corner to ponder over that question.

The beauty of the afternoon had gone off, and the sun set behind banked-up clouds, from which feathery flakes began to float down, before the twilight had fairly darkened the sky. It would evidently be no moonlight drive that night; but Mistress Sophy was young, and in a gay mood. Little she cared for snow and darkness; the time had hung heavy since Nathanael's departure, and in her pretty, willful way, she was set on this frolic. Dorothy expostulated, but there was really no harm; so with a gravely indulgent smile, she let the little creature have her own way. Old Mrs. Truefitt hardly liked the gay party, and evidently had but little faith in Reuben's driving, for she insisted on sitting beside him, while Sophy and Mercy were tucked into the seat behind. Wrapped

in warm cloaks and hoods, and bundled up in furs, of which there was a large supply at the Fythe House, bought from the neighboring Indians, the cold of the winter night raised the spirits and tinged the cheek with a deeper glow. Reuben, always proud and pleased to do his aunt Sophy's bidding, had his enjoyment slightly marred by the strong inclination shown by Mrs. Truefitt to cling to his arm at each short turn in the road, or slight bounce on a bit of frozen snow. He bore this, however, with great equanimity, looking forward to the homeward drive; but, alas, just as they were turning from the high road, to draw up at the little porch of Mrs. Truefitt's house, some one inside moved a candle to the window, sending out a stream of light, which perhaps dazzled the horse's eyes, or else the tramp of another horse approaching frightened Mrs. Truefitt, and made her lean over and cling to Reuben's arm. Whatever might be the cause was never clearly explained; but the sledge tipped. Mrs. Truefitt screamed, and Reuben threw his weight to the side that appeared so dangerously raised. The horse started forward suddenly, and the sledge regained its level, and came in front of the door. But the seat at the back was without occupants, and a confused heap of cloaks and furs lay in the snowy drift by the road-side.

Reuben knew that no serious injury was to be

feared; but he was vexed and ashamed, and hurriedly disengaged himself from Mrs. Truefitt. After landing her safely on her own steps, he turned to help his aunts. But they were already on their feet, and were being carefully escorted to the house by a stranger wrapped in a military cloak; while the dim outline of a horse standing near the fence showed whence the stranger had come.

"Ah, that is the way when young blood holds the reins," exclaimed Mother Truefitt. "'Tis a mercy we were not all killed. Jenny, Jenny, open the door, child," she shouted to her granddaughter within.

The old dame was slightly deaf, and her eyesight was none of the best; so she had not yet discovered that their two companions were not in the sledge. But, as the snow-covered figures came within the stream of light from the door that Jenny had now opened, she began to pour out a torrent of exclamations and questions, that were suddenly checked by the sight of the stranger.

Sophy's hood had fallen back, and her pretty, rosy face under the tumbled curls and disordered head-gear, sparkled with shamefaced merriment. Just as they came into the full glare of light, her escort started and exclaimed:

"Sophy Beatoun! is it possible, or do my senses deceive me?"

Sophy also started, and in a moment all her merriment gave place to an embarrassed surprise.

"Arthur Donnycourt," she said, doubtfully.

"I am truly flattered," replied the young officer. "I could not have ventured to hope that you would know me in the dark after all these years. But I have had a presentiment for the last half hour that, in spite of snow and darkness, I was approaching some singular good fortune; and now it is amply fulfilled."

This exaggerated tone of compliment, as well as the familiar voice, immediately identified to Sophy the young man whom she had thus suddenly encountered, as a distant cousin, whose father's estate lay very near her old home in England, and who had himself been her playmate in childhood.

Half-vexed and decidedly confused by the upset and the unexpected meeting, Sophy was not as quick as usual with a reply, when Mrs. Truefitt interrupted, saying:

"Mistress Rodman, pray come within doors. You have need to adjust your head-gear; and Jenny will make a cup of posset to keep you from taking cold. Or, will you have a glass of currant wine to steady your nerves? Ah, these young lads! I never knew but one—that was my son Ephraim—whom I could trust myself to drive with. He was as steady at fourteen as at forty."

"Yes, and as stupid," muttered Reuben, who was chafing sorely at the mishap and at these innuendoes. Then approaching his aunt, he said in a low, vexed tone, "Aunt Sophy, have none of the posset, 'tis detestable stuff."

"Nay, nay," replied Sophy, quickly; "I am none the worse, and need nothing; but I will just go inside and adjust my hood and thank the good dame." She spoke in low tones; but her voice was lower still as she turned to the young man and said: "A truce to nonsense, Arthur, these are my husband's kin." Then hastily she withdrew her hand from his arm and escaped into the house, leaving Mercy, who was still clinging to his arm, and who had been the only one to overhear distinctly the words that had passed between them.

The truth was, that poor Mercy had received the brunt of the fall, and it was only because she had a strong arm to cling to that she had managed to walk these few steps. She was now sorely vexed at the plight in which she found herself, and she strove to withdraw her hand. Young Donnycourt, in his first surprise at recognizing Sophy, had paid but little heed to his other charge. Now a slight exclamation, that was hardly more than a catching of the breath, made him look at her more closely.

"You are hurt," he exclaimed, as he saw the pucker

on her brow and the pale cheeks. Reuben did not catch these words, for at the same moment he called out:

"I thank you, good sir, for your timely assistance. Aunt Mercy, will you get into the sledge while I fetch the furs?"

He ran back to the spot where they lay in a dark heap on the snow, and at the same time, seeing that the stranger's horse, which had been unheeded since he leaped from its back, with hanging bridle, was beginning to move uneasily, he caught him, thinking that one good turn deserved another. Thus a few moments elapsed ere he returned to the sledge, with the bridle over one arm, and the furs over the other.

Mercy, finding herself thus thrown on the hands of the stranger, called up all her resolution, and said, bravely:

"It is naught, sir, I assure you. A mere trifling bruise; if you will kindly assist me, I will get into the sledge, as we must not be delayed in our return."

Donnycourt did as she requested, but with some expostulations, for he feared that she was really hurt. She however would not own it, and when settled in the sledge, cut short his anxious inquiries and suggestions with the words:

"Pray, sir, give no farther thought to the matter, and do not alarm my nephew and my sister-in-law.

Any farther delay in our return home would be very irksome to me."

As Reuben now returned with Donnycourt's horse, while, at the same moment, Sophy came forth, well muffled for the homeward ride, he could only acquiesce in silence. Thanks and farewells were exchanged, and mingled with these was old Dame Truefitt's repeated and pressing invitation, that he would come in and taste her currant wine, or take a little mulled cider, which did excellently well to keep out the cold. In another minute Arthur Donnycourt was standing alone with old Dame Truefitt, listening to the creak of the snow under the runners, as the sledge rapidly glided away into the darkness.

Vexed with himself that he had not learned more about these ladies, and craved permission to pay his respects to them; and urged, it must be owned, by a little of Mother Eve's curiosity concerning these new relations of Sophy's,—he accepted Dame Truefitt's invitation. Over the mulled cider he plied the old dame with so many questions that her gossip-loving nature became wonderfully alert, and she in her turn, drew a good deal more information from him than he either gave or dreamed of. His explanation that he was a cousin to Mistress Sophy and but little acquainted with her husband, was quite enough for the eager gossip to build on, and quite too simple for her

to believe. Cousin is a convenient title she decided in her own oracular mind.

"I could see it was a shock to him to find that she is married. Poor fellow, a nice, well-mannered young man, and handsome too."

It might have surprised her if she could have looked into his thoughts as he pursued his way to Providence, and have seen that they were mainly occupied over a certain mild and gentle face, with pale cheeks and grey eyes tearful with pain, while the firmly compressed mouth resolutely battled against these outward signs of suffering. In fact all the preoccupation of mind, noted by Dame Truefitt's observant eye, was due to the fact that he ardently desired to see that fair face again. But as he happened to know that he was no favorite with Nathanael; and as his cousin had not given him any invitation to call on her,—he was a little embarrassed how to proceed. Now, whilst he was debating the question whether he should risk a cool reception and boldly search out the house in the morning to inquire for his cousin, he found that his horse was growing unusually restive. At length, when Arthur strove to put him to a more rapid pace, he swerved to the left so suddenly that a less skilled rider would have run a good chance of being seated in the snow.

Donnycourt leaned forward to examine bridle and

bit; but in the darkness he could discover nothing amiss, and finally he dismounted to examine the horse's hoofs. As he stooped, his hand touched something soft that swung against the horse's legs as he moved. It was evidently hanging from the right stirrup, and on going round to that side Donnycourt discovered a little velvet bag entangled in the stirrup leather. It was such an extraordinary solution of the mysterious antics of his horse, that the young man laughed aloud as he detached it. But the next moment he checked his laughter and gave a low whistle of surprised pleasure, for here was the very opportunity he sought. The bag must belong to one of the ladies; and doubtless, as Reuben caught the horse and then gathered up the wraps and the furs, this little bag had become entangled in the stirrups. Of course, Arthur Donnycourt could do no less than wait upon the ladies to return it; and he thought to himself that with such an opening it would be his own fault if he did not get a chance to see more of the young maiden whose quiet resolution had attracted him, perhaps as much as her fair face.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN DONNYCOURT'S VISITS.

MERCY never had any very clear recollection how they got through that short drive home. Sophy, intent upon soothing Reuben, who she well knew felt mortified and vexed, chattered gayly to him without taking note of Mercy's silence. Reuben himself was too well used to a roll in the snow with his Aunt Mercy, in the days when he was a little toddler and she was a growing girl, to imagine that she, who was to the manner born, could have been hurt when Sophy, the stranger, had escaped uninjured. Thus it was not till they reached home and Mercy made an ineffectual attempt to get out of the sledge, that they found she was suffering.

Dorothy was at the door, and in a very short time, with the aid of Reuben's sturdy arm and Dorothy's more skillful assistance, she was conveyed into the house.

Sophy was warm in sympathetic praises of her bravery, and eager to do something to relieve her, though with very little idea how to set about it.

"Do you feel faint? Let me get my smelling-

bottle. Where are you hurt? Oh!" she exclaimed, as Dorothy took off Mercy's shoe and stocking and revealed a bruised and swollen ankle. "What shall we do? Is there a doctor near?"

"To bathe it and bandage it will be the best thing; and I thank the Lord that we have no need of a doctor to do that," answered Dorothy, a little proudly. "Good Dr. Vanderlight used to say, that no one could set a bandage like our mother, and that I took after her in skill in nursing."

"Bandages! yes, of course," said Sophy eagerly. "Take my handkerchief. But where is my reticule? I had both handkerchief and smelling-salts in it."

While she searched about for the reticule, Dorothy, who had her stores of old linen and other necessaries always ready, and who was half offended at the thought of tearing up a good cambric handkerchief, had brought hot water and prepared the bandages.

"Never mind the smelling-salts, Sister Sophy. In truth, I am not over-fond of that little bottle; it catches my nose," said Mercy, who had once, through curiosity, sniffed at it. "If you will help me to unfasten my cloak and hood, it will ease me greatly; for they are burdensome in this warm room."

Sophy, with her usual versatility, forgot all about the missing reticule, and was soon entirely absorbed in the little bustle of getting Mercy settled for the

night in the spare bedroom, which was on the ground floor. The reticule did not come to mind again until on the following day Dorothy came into the room, where Sophy was helping to beguile the time for Mercy, to tell her that Captain Donnycourt was inquiring for her.

Dorothy was not overpleased, for the uniform of the King's soldiers was not looked upon with any more favor in the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, than among their neighbors of Boston and Massachusetts Colony. The fact that Sophy rose with a little smile and a heightened color to go to receive the young man did not at all diminish her dissatisfaction.

Sophy was in doubt whether to laugh or to be vexed that Arthur had sought her out. He amused her, and she was used to his gallant, trifling ways. But she knew that Nathanael did not like him, and indeed she herself did not like him as well since she compared his manners with those of her husband. Still he amused her, and when she reached the parlor and he met her with his bright eyes and face glowing with unusual earnestness, as he inquired for the health of Miss Fythe, she found herself unwittingly launching out into warm praises of Mercy's heroism in bearing pain, and Arthur listening so attentively that she forgot her vexation.

When he rose to take leave and remarked that his duties would detain him a few days longer in Providence before he pursued his journey to Boston, she readily gave him the permission that he requested to wait upon them again, in order to inform himself concerning the recovery of Miss Fythe.

Sophy, it must be confessed, forgot the permission almost as readily as she gave it. She had truly a giddy little brain except where her affections were engaged, and although she had reckoned up to a minute the time when Nathanael might possibly return, she paid so little heed to the prospect of another visit from Arthur, that she did not mention it to either Dorothy or Mercy.

The next day was the Lord's Day, and the arrangement had been made that they should go to the Baptist Church in Providence and afterward dine according to invitation at Mr. Joseph Brown's. He was the only one of the four brothers who was a member of the Baptist Church, although they all took a hearty interest in its welfare. Sophy had gone a few times to the Episcopal Church, but Nathanael generally on one pretext or another did not accompany her and he had only gone to the Baptist Church to please his sister Dorothy. There he met with Mr. Joseph Brown, who was an electrician and astronomer of no small repute, and well versed in mechanics.

In the company of such a man Nathanael found much to interest him, and it soon became an habitual and settled thing that they should all go to hear the Reverend Samuel Winsor, at the Baptist Church, on the Lord's Day morning, and frequently they dined afterwards at Mr. Joseph Brown's.

"I would it were a better motive that drew him," said Dorothy to Mercy; "but if the seed falls, none can tell how soon it may take root and spring up."

As for Sophy, it might be truly said that her whole religion was to please her husband. When he preached at Rodmanhurst she sat in the vicarage pew, listening devoutly and admiringly; when he went to the Baptist Church in Providence she went too, and thought that, on the whole, though he did not occupy the prominent position that he filled in England, it was even more gratifying to have him sitting by her side finding the places for her in the Bible.

Now that he was away the Sunday meeting had no longer the same charm for her, but she was going on this Lord's Day with Dorothy. Mercy insisted that they should both go, saying, that her foot was much better and that with little Penelope's aid she could do very well.

Sophy's surprise was very great when she saw Arthur Donnycourt's brilliant uniform in a pew not far from Mr. Joseph Brown's. After the benediction

was pronounced and as they were leaving the church he came forward with the evident intention of addressing her, and then she discovered that he had made the acquaintance of Mr. Brown and was also invited to dine at his house.

Donnycourt had that quick and versatile mind which delights to dabble a little in everything new. He knew just enough of astronomy to talk fluently concerning the transit of Venus, of which Mr. Brown had taken such diligent and successful observations on the preceding third of June. He had also seen new electrical instruments in London, shortly before his regiment was ordered to America, and thus he was at no loss for conversation. Mistress Dorothy, however, was ill-pleased, but she showed it only by an unusually quiet and reserved demeanor, and Sophy was not quick to note it. Reuben was, on the contrary, greatly taken with the gay young officer. He had drunk in many tales of English life, which Sophy was ever ready to relate, in order to while away an idle hour, and now he was eager to get a chance to question one who had evidently seen a good deal of life, and that a much more stirring life than was afforded by the planting and harvesting in summer, and the routine farm-work, interspersed with study in winter, which had hitherto occupied Reuben's days on the Fythe farm. In the presence of his elders, the

boy had been too well trained not to hold his peace; and Donnycourt was not likely to touch on any very stirring adventures in his discourse with the refined and learned Mr. Joseph Brown. But he noticed the eager face of the bright-eyed lad, and made opportunities to speak a few pleasant words to him. In short, Arthur Donnycourt tried to please, and he did please everybody but Mistress Dorothy, who was much relieved when the young officer had made his adieux.

Her surprise and discomfiture were therefore very great when, the next afternoon, as she was tidying up after her Monday's work, which was heavier than usual now that Mercy was laid up, she heard his voice in the parlor. A fire had been made there and Mercy was installed on the sofa; because, as Dorothy remarked, she would never stay on the settee in the kitchen while work was going on about her. The injury to her ankle was of that inconvenient nature which, while it did not absolutely render her unable to walk, might become really serious if she took no care of it.

Thus it came about that when the young officer was shown into the parlor by Reuben, who met him at the door, he found the very person whom he most wished to see, ensconced there a prisoner on the sofa. Mercy, out of the few words she had overheard, had woven for him the same little romance

that old Mrs. Truefitt had more elaborately concocted by dint of skillful questioning. There was, however, a great difference; for while the old dame had merely chuckled over a choice bit of gossip, the childlike and tender-hearted maiden was nourishing a deep pity for the hidden sorrow that, she supposed, had been inadvertently revealed to her.

The fact that he came again to the house led her to the conclusion that Sophy had never known aught of his feelings, and she was even vexed at the careless manner in which that giddy little matron addressed him when she came in from the kitchen, with a big apron enveloping her trim little figure and her sleeves rolled up over her dimpled elbows, making a great show of work after the fashion of those merry little people who never do enough of it to spoil the charm of novelty.

Arthur Donnycourt, however, was at that moment very well content with his lot. He discoursed of Mr. Winsor's sermon to Mercy; argued very sensibly on the much-debated question of singing in the church, and took great interest in all the prospects of the new college. The only references to his own life were occasional slight allusions, apparently almost unintentional on his part and quickly turned aside, as if he considered himself and his comrades a sad lot, not worthy of the attention of

this good, gentle, innocent maiden. Doubtless this was very true, and probably the young man himself sincerely felt at the moment the vast difference between their lives; but he could hardly have used a more potent spell to arouse Mercy's interest.

The entrance of Sophy scarcely interrupted their conversation; but when a little later Dorothy and Penelope appeared the atmosphere changed subtly. Dorothy had been busy all the morning with her usual housework, but she looked as neat as if she had been doing nothing more laborious than stitching the frills for her brother's shirts, over which, in truth, little Penelope under her supervision had been pricking her left hand forefinger. The force of her dislike to young Donnycourt's presence was considerably diverted and dissipated by the amazed disapprobation excited by the sight of Sophy's attire. It was close upon the dinner hour, and her sense of hospitality would not allow her to withhold the invitation to share a meal with them, which in her father's days was always pressed upon a guest. Donnycourt, however, saw that it would be wiser to take leave as speedily as was consistent with civility; he therefore pleaded an engagement in the town, but he at the same time adroitly slipped in a wedge to ensure the continuance of intercourse.

"I am unfortunate in not having the pleasure of

meeting Mr. Rodman, whose knowledge and judgment I can at least appreciate, though he, doubtless, looks upon me as a sad scatter-brain. May I be permitted to call when he returns if, as I hope, my duties should allow me to remain in Providence a few days longer?" he asked, and his deferential air won a reluctant consent from Dorothy. Sophy was not well pleased with the tone of the compliment to her husband, but she knew Arthur too well to make great account of his speeches, and she only replied carelessly:

"Oh, yes, come again. Nathanael will be very glad to see you, and you can discuss the latest news from Boston. He will probably return to-morrow."

"Indeed, Sophy, I think that is hardly possible," interposed Dorothy. "I should not expect him before Wednesday or Thursday; and, you know, he said he might be detained three weeks."

"I call it a month already since he left," answered Sophy petulantly. "But and even if he be not returned, we shall be pleased to see you, if you bring not tea, or stamped paper, or any other of those red rags to provoke us withal."

At this juncture Donnycourt wisely made his exit with a respectful bow. Indeed the door had hardly closed after him, when Dorothy's feelings found speech.

"Stamped paper, indeed! As if the veriest child knew not that the iniquitous Stamp Act was repealed four years ago. And in truth, Mistress Rodman, I think you would be better employed in arranging your gown than in discussing matters of legislation with a young officer of the King's troops, in flour-dusted apron and tucked-up sleeves."

"Nay, Sister Dorothy, to my eyes he wore but a very proper uniform," answered Sophy demurely. Then seeing that Dorothy looked both puzzled and vexed, she added coaxingly: "Be not too hard on me, good sister, I meant no harm, and there is always such good sense in your words that it matters little if the sentences are a little mixed. Come, Penelope, we must make ourselves as tidy as Aunt Dorothy."

She took the little girl's hand and as her bright face and offending apron disappeared from the parlor, Dorothy shook her head slowly, saying:

"In truth, the child has a better head of the two, but Sophy's heart is warm, and it is to that we must look." And the pucker smoothed out of her brow.

CHAPTER V.

THE SEEDS OF MISCHIEF.

WHEN Arthur Donnycourt closed the house door behind him, he found Reuben idly cutting twigs from the box-bushes that lined the path to the gate. A pleasant nod and word from the young man brought the boy quickly to his side, and the two walked down to the gate together. Arthur had come on foot, and as Reuben remarked this and also noted that his company did not seem to be disagreeable to the young officer, he could not resist the chance to turn the conversation on matters more interesting to him than the subjects that engrossed either his Aunt Mercy or Mr. Joseph Brown.

"Stop and see me at the inn, my lad, when you are in town," said Arthur in friendly tones, as he extended his hand to say good-bye, but Reuben replied:

"If you do not mind, I will walk with you a little way."

Their chat soon drifted on military life, and Reuben drank in eagerly all the anecdotes of camp

and field that Donnycourt's easy and upright narration made particularly attractive to an imaginative, fearless boy.

"Mother wants me to study," he said at last; "but, oh, I would choose to be like the old knights of whom Aunt Sophy tells me. She knows so many tales about the old pictures in her father's home and at Rodmanhurst. There was one old baron who could not even write his name, but you should hear her tell of the battles he fought."

"Aye, aye, Roland Donnycourt," said Arthur, laughing, "well do I know the history of the old rascal; he is an ancestor of mine too. He was always, I remember, a favorite with your aunt Sophy, and she inspired me——"

He broke off suddenly to raise his hat to old Mrs. Truefitt, who met them as they turned a corner, then as she passed on, he continued:

"I too thought him a fine fellow in those days; but now, I confess, I think he must have been a quarrelsome old knave; and I much prefer to be able to sign my name and even to write a letter if I am so minded without being obliged to call in the aid of a scribe."

Reuben did not exactly like the bantering tone of this last remark. He was very sensitive to either praise or ridicule. Serious blame he often took with

good-humored carelessness, but to be laughed at was more than he could stand, and this jesting tone caused him to remember what he had hitherto overlooked, that it was already past his dinner hour. He therefore said good-bye to his companion, who pursued his way to the town with a light heart and a brain filled with visions of a gentle, fair-faced maiden.

"Far too good for a scamp like me," he muttered to himself, but at the same time he meditated with satisfaction that he had a much clearer record to look back on, than most young men of his age and calling. He had yet to learn the meaning of the words "He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad," and little he imagined what seed might be reaped from thoughtless words.

"Why is it," thought Reuben as he strode impatiently along the hard-beaten snow, "that people always make light of what they have? He pretends to think lightly of his ancestors, but here am I, the son of a farmer, the grandson of a minister, who worked at carpentering to make a living, when first he began to preach; and if I go back farther, they are still farmers or carpenters, digging and working hard. Would he exchange with me and take my chance of farming and studying in humdrum monotony like my ancestors before me? Why, even little Penelope has something to be proud of, that she

comes of a race of warriors, while I—" he broke off and stamped the snow as he knitted his brows petulantly. "But somebody must make a beginning; and why should not I? Mother would not force me to study or to farm if I told her that I hated it."

Sophy's hand had prepared the soil and Arthur had dropped the seed, but nobody's appetite was disturbed that day by any thoughts of the consequences; and even Reuben himself over his savory dish of broth and steaming dumplings forgot for the time his military ardor.

Old Mrs. Truefitt had stopped to recommend a lotion for Mercy's ankle, but her memory of the lotion had been quickened by her shrewd suspicion that the young officer was coming from a visit to young Mistress Rodman.

"That young man's thoughts and speech run too much on 'Aunt Sophy,'" she thought to herself as she heard his words to Reuben. "But it is no affair of mine," and having reached that very true conclusion, she immediately followed it up by stopping at the Fythe Farm to pick up any stray crumbs of information about the young man's visit.

Sophy had been all her life a spoiled pet, but she was too sweet-tempered and loving to grow as imperious and disagreeable as spoiled pets often become.

She was, however, ruled only by her natural disposition to be pleasant even to mere acquaintances, and by her own strong affection for those who loved her.

When Mrs. Truefitt began to talk about the young officer she only tossed her curly head with a little laugh and demurely remarked:

"Doubtless, there is attraction for a soldier used only to tents or barrack life, when he finds opportunity to spend an hour in a gentlewoman's parlor."

"Doubtless, doubtless," said the old dame, nodding her head, and adding in a lower tone, "He came not again to taste of my currant wine."

Dorothy caught the words imperfectly, but she wisely followed the good rule where gossips are concerned that "the least said is the soonest mended."

The days slipped by, and the March winds were careering wildly in from the Bay before Nathanael returned. The young captain came and went with a frequency that was noted even by less prying eyes than Dame Truefitt's. But he did not meet Mr. Rodman, for the very day before Nathanael returned, he took a hasty leave of his friends in Providence, and departed on his way to New York. At the news of his departure Sophy shrugged her shoulders, and carelessly said:

"Aye, aye, here to-day and gone to-morrow, that is

Arthur Donnycourt's way. 'Tis what makes army life so finely to his taste."

Dorothy said nothing, but heaved a sigh of relief, only Mercy's gentle face looked troubled.

The next day they had very different matter to fill their minds, for just as they were rising from their early dinner, the thud of hoofs outside caused Mistress Sophy to run hastily to the door to welcome back her husband.

He had hardly time to answer one or two of her quick and wide-reaching questions, comprehending in two minutes all topics from the state of affairs in Boston, to the state of his appetite at the present moment, when a new arrival intruded himself upon their reunion, in the person of a short, apple-cheeked young man, with pleasant, honest, blue eyes, but a sadly bashful manner that allowed one rarely to get a glimpse of those eyes, so steadfastly did he survey the floor.

Sophy was provoked that she could not have her husband to herself in these first moments of his return from a long journey, but she was not so much absorbed in her own affairs as not to notice the pleasant greeting that Dorothy gave to the new-comer as she came forward and introduced him as Jonathan Pursell; she also caught the fleeting look of vexation which passed over Mercy's face.

"Matters in Boston are bad enough," said Nathanael, as they all entered the dining-room where a glorious fire was blazing on the hearth. "There has been trouble between the soldiers and the towns-people."

"What is it all about?" asked Sophy anxiously. "Were you in danger? Were you hurt?"

"I? Oh, no! but there are five dead, and as many more wounded," replied Nathanael.

Jonathan Pursell, who had been sitting with downcast eyes since Mercy had coolly answered his first attempt to address her, and then had taken herself off to attend to getting dinner on the table for her brother, now looked up and remarked:

"I have heard something of this massacre, Mr. Rodman. I doubt there will never be peace in that town as long as these useless red-backs are kept lounging about where there is no need of them. They have had naught but troubles since General Gage sent these idle loungers to strut like turkey-cocks about the peaceable town."

His indignation made the young man forget his bashfulness; and Sophy was surprised to see how different he looked when his face became lighted up with intelligence and decision.

"Aye, there have been sore troubles. They have been brewing long, and in my opinion the towns-folk sought to provoke what they got," said Nathanael.

"Sought to provoke the soldiers to fire on them in cold blood, as they did last Monday night? Nay, nay, Mr. Rodman," replied Jonathan.

"I'll not say that," interposed Nathanael; "but you yourself can judge how you would like to be ever assailed with rude jests and nicknames."

"And what would you say of me if I answered the rudest jests or abuse by firing into a crowd of unarmed men? Boston will never forget her dead and wounded citizens, and the night of the fifth of March was a bad one for British rule," said Jonathan with a sternness that he hardly seemed capable of when seen unmoved by aught except self-consciousness.

During the eager conversation that followed, Mercy, having placed the dinner on the table, slipped out of the room. Pursell, who had been hospitably pressed to sit down with Nathanael, glanced several times towards the door, and by degrees relapsed into his former shy awkwardness. At last he rose to go, but still Mercy had not re-appeared. Dorothy quietly left the room and went up-stairs to seek her sister.

"Come down, Mercy," she said; "Jonathan is just going. What possessed you to come up to this cold room? You are all red and blue with cold."

"I wanted to mend the fagoting in this pillow-case," replied Mercy, as she carefully darned her needle into the bit of linen drawn-work.

"Well, put it down now and come and say good-bye to Jonathan. It passes me, why you did not bring your work-basket down to the fireside," said Dorothy impatiently as she went down-stairs again.

Mercy followed obediently, but the good-bye that she accorded to Jonathan Pursell was as chilling as were the blue numbed fingers that she allowed him to take for a moment in his own.

Sophy's quick eyes were taking note of everything; and even Nathanael had noticed the young man's frequent glances toward the door, and his evident desire to win a friendly glance when Mercy entered.

"He is a wheelwright," explained Dorothy, after he had gone. "His father was an old friend of our father, and Jonathan has good parts."

"He is as awkward as a school-boy who is afraid of a caning," said Reuben, coming in from the stable, where he had been attending to the visitor's horse.

"May-be he hath cause to be so. May-be you will be shy and awkward yourself one of these days, my lad," replied Nathanael, a slight smile flickering over his usually grave face, as his eyes followed Mercy, who had gone to the kitchen with plates and dishes.

Who can count how often we do a foolish or even a wrong deed, thinking that we will set it right directly and no harm will follow? Then come unforeseen hindrances; we cannot do the setting right;

and finally we drift to the catastrophe, bewailing the inevitable fate that has overtaken us where no harm was intended.

It was only giddy levity that led Sophy to encourage the visits of Captain Donnycourt to the Fythe House, added to which was a little roguish malice, as she saw that the gay young officer who had danced and coquetted unscathed with many a court belle, was rapidly losing his heart to the little New England maiden. If any one had prophesied that the matter would ever assume a serious aspect, and even cause misunderstanding between her husband and herself, she would have laughed the idea to scorn with merry incredulity. Yet she did not find at once a convenient time to speak to her husband of Arthur Donnycourt, and if she had carefully asked herself "why," she would have discovered that it was because she knew that Nathanael was not likely to hear with satisfaction of his repeated visits. She however did not question. She simply let a possibly disagreeable subject alone, and listened with unusual solemnity, while her husband spoke of the Boston troubles, of which she understood scarcely anything. She thus let her amusing, but rather troublesome, cousin slip clean out of her volatile little head. If Mercy remembered him, she never spoke of him, while Dorothy was too glad to be rid of him to care to revive his memory.

Thus it happened that the first Nathanael heard of him was in the tap-room of an inn. He had made an appointment to meet his friends, the Browns, in Providence, and he had stopped at Olney's Tavern to refresh himself and to stable his horse.

The tap-room was apparently empty when he entered it, but he heard a voice from the other side of the broad fireplace, saying:

"They are all a lazy, vicious set, officers and men. They may call the Twenty-ninth Regiment worse than the others, but I say they are all bad. Was it for any good ends that the young red-coat was forever dangling after pretty Mistress Sophy Rodman when her good man was away in Boston?"

"Do you mean Captain Donnycourt?" said another voice that Nathanael recognized at once as Jonathan Pursell's, though it sounded rather constrained and unnatural. "Nay, 'twas another tale that I heard about the visits to the Fythe Farm."

A hearty laugh from the first speaker followed these words, as he answered bluntly:

"Is that the way the wind sets? Cheer up, man, and never look so chap-fallen. 'Tis not our sweet Mistress Mercy, bless her gentle heart, that would have aught to say to a roystering young captain of dragoons. I was only angered that the good man was not there to send the fellow packing with all his

gay airs and graces. But never heed my words. I would not be like Mother Truefitt and the chipmunks, noted for my tale-bearing. This idle talk always breeds mischief."

Nathanael waited to hear no more. He did not even wait to get a sight of the men, screened as they were by the high back of a wooden settle. He was puzzled for a moment to understand the allusion to Donnycourt, as he had not thought of him for a considerable time. Then as he comprehended more clearly, he was surprised, vexed, and hurt; and not wishing to show either of these feelings to Pursell and his companion, he prudently took himself off. He knew very well that anger with him was no flash in the pan, and he did not want to get angry about such a simple matter as a visit from Sophy's cousin. He cared nothing about young Donnycourt, but he was very sensitive to any indications that Sophy looked upon him with dread, or with any feeling of constraint. Like many a man who knows that he has whims and peculiarities, he needed some one by whom he could feel sure that he was thoroughly understood, and he dreaded any break in that complete understanding between himself and his wife all the more, because he was well aware that at times he gave good cause for such a break. Thus, through all his talk with Mr. Brown, disagreeable questions

would arise. Why had no one told him that Arthur Donnycourt had been in Providence? He remembered that he had growled to Sophy about the "young jackanapes" when he met him in England. Was she therefore afraid to tell him that the young man had turned up here? He wanted to go home, and ask about the matter in straightforward fashion, but he was half afraid of himself. Having had for so many years to humor the whims of his capricious grandfather and his peevish, jealous cousin, had taught Nathanael to be very taciturn; and, truth to say, had soured him not a little. If he spoke about Donnycourt, Sophy might think he was blaming her.

Having finished his talk with Mr. Brown, he met two or three other friends and they were hot and eager over the question, whether the troops that had been removed outside of Boston since the massacre would again be ordered to return within the town; and whether the non-importation laws would be as strictly enforced among all the colonies as they were in New York. Nathanael had been merely an onlooker and somewhat undecided as to which side was in the right until the scenes in Boston on the fifth of March had roused his indignation. He felt that it was an outrage that the soldiers should have been ordered to fire upon the people. He entered into the discussions of his friends with real and increased in-

terest, and at length, almost without intending it, he found himself engaging to make a journey to New York to find out what measures would be taken there.

Mistress Sophy had at last had time to recall to mind the volatile Captain Donnycourt, and with her usual lively impatience, she was longing for her husband's return from his ride to pour out to him the account of that young man's visit. When at last he rode up to the house he was accompanied by one of their neighbors, and in the talk that followed and the unwelcome tidings that Nathanael was again to be absent on a journey, Captain Donnycourt again slipped out of Sophy's perturbed mind. Penelope too was ailing with a cold; and while Dorothy was compounding a treacle posset, Mercy heating bricks for the child's feet, and Sophy coddling and petting her, the evening passed away and Nathanael saw no convenient opportunity to ask about what visitors they had had during his absence.

He had not yet decided what to say. In fact, he fully expected that Sophy would mention Arthur, and since she did not, he was again vexed, and unwilling therefore to speak, lest he should show his vexation.

The next day he found Dorothy alone in the kitchen and in sheer desperation he blundered out:

"What ailed you, Dorothy, to let that young British captain come gallanting about here in my absence?"

Dorothy looked up quickly and stopped her busy rolling-pin.

"Indeed, brother, it was an accident that brought him here, and well pleased should I have been had he kept himself away," she answered rather sharply. "He was no old friend of *mine*."

The emphasis on the last word and the vexed tone made Nathanael answer more cautiously:

"Well, well, Dorothy, I meant not to blame; only to give a word of warning. Where there are young and pretty women, and the good man is away, it is my opinion that such gay macaronis should be taught to keep their distance."

"I am with you there, brother," replied Dorothy, "and right glad I was to see him ride off. But in truth I think no harm is done, for I have not heard his name once, till yesterday, when your wife spoke of him, but I gave her little encouragement to proceed, for I would far rather that his name were forgotten."

It was now Nathanael's turn to feel his pride rise wrathfully; for Dorothy spoke anxiously, and he had quite forgotten that Mercy filled her thoughts almost as completely as his wife filled his.

"Tush, no one here will think twice of him when he is gone; unless it be you, Dorothy," he answered shortly. Then he strode to the window and stood

looking out at the grey clouds streaked with the red bars of the windy March sunset.

Dorothy held her peace and resumed the work of preparing supper, and that was all that was said concerning Captain Donnycourt. In the evening Nathanael worked off a little of his spleen, harmlessly as he thought, by dubbing the British officers a lot of lazy young rakes in talk with a neighbor who had dropped in to enjoy a pipe and a mug of cider. Sophy's color rose a little, but she glanced at Mercy who moved her chair a little farther from the candle and brought herself into shadow, though she was working some fine embroidery.

That night it was not forgetfulness that kept Mistress Sophy's nimble tongue chatting to her husband on any other topic than on that of their visitor of the preceding weeks.

"Men are sure to do just the wrong thing," she argued wisely to herself, "and Nathanael would very likely abuse Arthur before Mercy and thus make her think twice as much of him. As he is going away, and is not likely to hear about Arthur from any one else, I will wait till he comes back. And then, with this Boston affair less hot on his mind, he can look at the matter coolly."

Nathanael also held his peace, albeit a little sourly, and a day or two later he rode away to New York.

CHAPTER VI.

NATHANAEL GIVES ADVICE TO JONATHAN PURSELL.

MAY Day evening, and, although it was Tuesday and not a Lord's Day evening, a crowd was rapidly filling the meeting house in the city of New York, in which the Rev. John Gano was accustomed to preach. To-night, however, it was in order to hear a friend newly returned from the South that they were thus assembling. The Rev. Hezekiah Smith had arrived in the city only the day before, after a tour of some months, which extended to the Provinces of the Carolinas and Georgia, for the purpose of collecting monies to aid the new enterprise of the Rhode Island Baptist College.

Among the listeners seated in a large square pew near the pulpit were noticeable the dark and rather stern features of Nathanael Rodman, and beside him the shy and awkward Jonathan Pursell, his eyes downcast and his sandy hair and eyebrows showing more distinctly than ever against the heightened glow of his naturally ruddy complexion. But after the tall figure of the minister rose and the text was given out, Jonathan's whole expression and attitude

gradually changed. The words were: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Ezekiel xxxvi. 26. Nathanael, who had come rather under protest and merely to please his companion, found his attention held at once by the words, and by the powerful and commanding voice of the young preacher. He was apparently little over thirty, but the quiet dignity of his manner, and his thoughtful and eloquent speech insured reverent attention. Nathanael, though himself deeply interested, could not avoid noticing the change in the aspect of his companion, who sat upright, every trace of painful embarrassment gone, and his blue eyes fixed with keen and thoughtful gaze upon the preacher, evidently drinking in and weighing every word.

"He is really a manly fellow when he is interested, and roused," thought Nathanael, for perhaps the twentieth time since they had begun their journey together, some two weeks before. "But his heart is not in the wheelwright trade."

After the sermon, Nathanael expected to leave at once, but, to his surprise, the preacher who had marked them with his observant glance came directly towards them, extending a friendly hand to Jonathan with a cordial greeting. Jonathan returned the greet-

ing with equal cordiality and at once introduced his companion. Nathanael spoke with civility, but he was annoyed. He was ready to come and listen for an hour or two to please Jonathan, but in his own mind he had no intention of associating with "dissenting preachers," as he termed them, and he had always held himself aloof from the pastor of the Providence Baptist Church. His temper was not improved when he heard Jonathan promise to walk home with Mr. Smith, as their roads happened to lie in the same direction. On the way, however, he became more interested than he chose to own in Mr. Smith's account of his travels in the Southern Provinces. Jonathan seemed to be unusually interested, and he asked many questions about the sympathy shown in the welfare of the Rhode Island College and the success of Mr. Smith's collections.

"I cannot do much to help it on myself," said Jonathan as they were approaching the spot where their roads diverged, "but I am very glad to hear that other people are taking up the matter energetically."

"Why should not the College do something to help *you* on?" asked Mr. Smith.

Jonathan made rather a stammering reply, and after they had said "good-night" and parted, he relapsed into his usual embarrassed silence.

Mr. Smith's tone as he asked the question and Jonathan's manner in replying caused a little idle wonderment in Nathanael's mind, but he was too much occupied with thoughts about his own private matters, and his interest in public affairs, to spend much time in surmises concerning his bashful companion. His surprise was therefore very great when a short time after this first encounter he happened to meet Mr. Smith alone and the conversation turned upon Jonathan.

"He is a pleasant fellow when he can shake off his shyness and embarrassed air," said Nathanael.

"Yes," replied Mr. Smith, "and there is much more in him than you would suppose. But he is fighting a hard battle, and I am often anxious about him, lest he should lose his hold on the right. Some years ago Jonathan was baptized by my kind and much esteemed friend, the Rev. Ebenezer Fythe, your step-father, I believe. The Spirit of the Lord then seemed to be leading him to the work of the ministry. Then for some reason that I cannot understand he seemed to halt and debate. I hope that no evil influence is at work."

"For 'heaven's sake do not try to make a preacher of the man if he does not want to be one," exclaimed Nathanael. Then seeing his companion's look of surprise and realizing his own discourtesy, he added

in gentler tones, "I crave your pardon for my rudeness. But I have seen something of those who are put to this work when their heart is not in it, and to my mind all those that aid or abet such blunders have a great deal to answer for. 'Tis a slender chance if a man be not thereby set against everything connected with the church."

"You speak truly," replied Mr. Smith gravely, "but methinks the man who is simply striving to follow his Master and to work for his glory and the advancement of his kingdom will not be tamely led by his fellow man. He who enters on the work of the ministry from an unworthy reason will surely never prosper; and he who is held back from it by unworthy motives will as surely work injury to his soul."

The words struck home, for Nathanael well knew that his object had been merely money and a home for his intended wife. But he could not take offence, for the young minister's grave and courteous manner bore not the slightest indications of any intention to give a personal reproof; and for his own part he felt conscious that his hasty answer to Mr. Smith's remark had not been free from a tincture of rudeness.

After a moment's pause Mr. Smith resumed:

"I imagine that, as fellow-travelers, you may sometimes have opportunity for serious discourse with the

young man. May I ask that you will try to drop a timely word of counsel."

"I fear that you greatly overrate my ability to give advice, or the influence any words of mine would carry," replied Nathanael; but he could not refuse to give the promise.

On the Sunday following this conversation Nathanael was surprised by a request from Jonathan for a little private conversation with him. On the previous Sunday, Mr. Smith had preached three times from Mr. Gano's pulpit and Nathanael had been attracted, almost against his will, to attend both in the morning and the afternoon, but Jonathan went in the evening also, and seemed to be so deeply interested that Nathanael was tempted to ask him if he could not spend the whole day in church. He was therefore surprised to find Jonathan now, apparently inclined to spend the Sunday afternoon in conversation. He made no objection, however, and they went out together to walk in the pleasant May sunlight.

"Is it because Mr. Smith is away that your fit of church going has moderated?" asked Nathanael with a touch of satire in his tone.

"He has but gone to the Jerseys for a few days," replied Jonathan reddening and twitching his hand nervously. "He will be back in New York before he sets out on his homeward journey."

"And then you will again go three times a day to meeting," said Nathanael.

"Mr. Rodman, you have good cause to think meanly of me and of my profession of religion," began Jonathan after a short pause, in which all his natural embarrassment perceptibly increased. "Doubtless, you have heard of my desire to become a minister of the gospel, and my wavering and delay can give you but a poor opinion of me."

"Nay, my friend," said Nathanael quickly, "it is far better to delay, and even finally to decide to pursue another calling, than to take any such step inconsiderately, when your heart is not really in it. I honor, instead of blaming, such scruples of conscience."

"You mistake me. Mine are no scruples of conscience," said Jonathan in a low tone and averting his face. "My sentiments towards your sister—my hopes—what I could offer to her if she would listen kindly." He was growing more and more confused and incoherent, and Nathanael walked on by his side in a grave and impassive silence that in no wise aided him to collect and choose his words. His thoughts were sufficiently distinct, but the difficulty was to express them in such words as would best conceal the fault of which he himself was painfully conscious.

At last, knowing something of the past history of

the man he was addressing and counting on his sympathy Jonathan ended, in sheer desperation, bluntly enough:

"In truth, sir, I love your sister, and were I to give up my present business, I should have neither home, nor means of subsistence to offer her."

"Am I to understand that my sister has given you any right to consider your future as connected with her?" asked Nathanael coldly.

"No, no," replied Jonathan, again stammering in his confusion. "I have not dared—it did not seem a propitious moment—but, in time, I might win——"

Nathanael interrupted him sharply.

"Then, sir, you mean to say that you wish to be assured of the answer my sister would give to your suit, before you decide whether you have any call to become a minister."

His meaning was certainly put clearly enough; but in these bald words it looked badly, and Jonathan winced and remained silent, feeling half offended, half ashamed.

"If you want any opinion from me," continued Nathanael, "I can only say that, from the short acquaintance I have had with my sister, I should not imagine that your indecision is likely to increase your chances of finding favor in her eyes. What effect such indecision will have on your character, in

case she should be inclined to listen to you favorably, you can probably best appreciate."

"Mr. Rodman, you are cruel," exclaimed Jonathan. "Can you not make allowances for me? It is a hard position."

"Perhaps it is; yes, I know it is," said Nathanael, thawing from his coldly indifferent manner; "but we judge of a man by the way he acts in hard positions. If you now drop the work that you feel your conscience calls you to, in the hope of winning a wife, you will either put your own wishes before your conscience in much slighter matters as time goes on, or else, you will depend on your wife to be conscience for you, and neither way is a true and manly course."

He was speaking strongly, much more strongly, than he would have spoken had it been a mere outside question; but, in truth, he was taking a sort of grim pleasure in scourging himself over Jonathan's shoulders.

Jonathan was surprised and indignant.

"If that is your estimate of me, sir," he replied, "it would certainly be useless for me to ask your approbation of my suit; and perhaps it will be as well for me to trouble you no longer with my society at present."

He was turning away, but Nathanael laid a hand on his arm, saying:

"Stay, Pursell, let us have no folly. I am no judge of your matters of church or conscience; and as for my sister, she is free to choose for herself. I have arrived too recently to expect my opinion to be either needed or desired in any question of friendship or even warmer feeling towards those who were intimate with them when I was almost wholly unknown. Doubtless, being both of the same creed and persuasion, you can understand each other better than I can understand either of you. There is no need that we should be wroth over the matter."

Jonathan rather reluctantly slackened his steps, and again walked on by Nathanael's side. But he was ill at ease, and soon made a more amiable excuse to part company. He had certainly not expected such an answer from a man who wore his religion as loosely as did Nathanael; and it was for that very reason he had sought counsel with him instead of with Mr. Smith. Though the latter having recently entered into the ministry, and being an old friend of Jonathan's, as well as intimately acquainted with Mercy and with her father, might be supposed to have better qualifications to advise him and to sympathize with him.

Nathanael on his side was inwardly growling at himself for interfering in the matter at all.

'He is a good fellow, and would no doubt make a

kind husband to Mercy, and in these troubled times it would be well if she were settled. What do I care about their preaching and preachers! Between him and Mr. Smith I have been making a fool of myself." Thus he thought to himself rather angrily, but he wound up with the reflection, "After all, he is too simple-hearted and conscientious to be happy if he goes against what he thinks to be right, and that is just the thing that makes me like him.

"Now if Rupert and his wife had not been so detestably supercilious and disagreeable, I might have been still preaching sermons in Rodmanhurst Church on matters that I know and care nothing about," and he struck at a pebble with a stick that was in his hand as viciously as if it were the self that he took a morbid delight in sneering at. In fact, Nathanael had never succeeded in stifling his conscience, or in feeling himself fitted for his position, and it was only his love for his wife and his feeling of duty to his grandfather that made it at all endurable. When Rupert's wife made herself exceedingly disagreeable to Sophy, and his grandfather was no longer living to be annoyed by his departure, he willingly made use of the moderate sum left to him in Sir Peter's will, to transport himself and his family to the New World.

CHAPTER VII.

JONATHAN PURSELL'S DECISION.

JONATHAN PURSELL'S was the very reverse of a morbid nature. He was sensitive to blame or ridicule, but his healthy spirit and simple Christianity made him reap the good without the evil effect of such sensitiveness.

When on the following day he came to say that his business in New York was ended, and he intended to start for home on the following morning, his manner was so entirely free from pique that it was impossible for Nathanael to imagine that any feeling of offended dignity was causing him to hasten his return. He set it down rather to Jonathan's desire to have an explanation with Mercy and to learn his fate. As for Nathanael himself, he was feeling both morbid and irritated. His business in New York was finished also, and he might as well have returned with Jonathan, but he delayed for no better reason than is often to be found when a man is not on good terms with himself and has nothing particular to do. He contented himself with sending a letter to Sophy, saying that he might be back shortly, but fixing no date.

In the little household at the Fythe Farm matters

had not gone on comfortably since Nathanael's departure. Penelope's slight cold had grown worse and fever had set in. Old Dame Truefitt, the oracle of the neighborhood in all cases of illness, predicted scarlet fever, and Dorothy was greatly disturbed, for neither Mercy nor Reuben had had the fever.

"Let them both come over to our house," said old Mrs. Truefitt, "and I will come here and help you to nurse the child."

Mercy was inclined to rebel against this arrangement, since she was very fond of little Penelope, and she did not like the Truefitts. While the question was still undecided, an invitation came for Mercy to accompany Mrs. Brown to visit friends in Newport.

"It will be just the change that Mercy needs," said Dorothy. "She has been looking pale and downhearted, and it will do her good. Now, Mercy, you must go."

She did not add that old Mrs. Truefitt among the items of gossip that seemed always to fill her reticule had mentioned that she had been told by somebody who knew, that Captain Donnycourt had said that he would be back in Providence some time in May.

Mercy unwillingly yielded, and Dorothy breathed freely when she was fairly off. It was, however, a great mistake that Dorothy had not taken Mistress Sophy into her confidence. Her plotting ran little

chance of succeeding against the quick wit of that busy little matron.

Shortly after Mercy's departure a messenger arrived with a billet for Mistress Sophy. Penelope was in that trying state for both invalid and nurses, not ill enough to cause much anxiety but enough to interfere with regular occupation and to require a good deal of walking and a large amount of amusing. This billet from her cousin formed a pleasing break in the monotony of Sophy's life. It was merely an intimation that Arthur would be in Providence the following day, and a request that he might present his respects in person to the ladies at the Fythe Farm.

Mistress Sophy did not greatly care to see him herself, and she had a shrewd idea that it was her pretty sister-in-law whom he desired to see. Arthur had been devoted to so many fair ladies that Sophy had little concern for his heart, but she could not resist a little spirit of mischievous interest in a love affair, and while Dorothy was with Penelope, she mended her pen and indited a few lines informing her cousin of the fact that there was fever in the house and advising him not to venture near them at present. She added in the inevitable postscriptum, that Reuben was staying with a neighbor and that Mistress Mercy was on a visit to the Thurstons in Newport to avoid the danger of contagion. Having sealed this missive and

delivered it to the messenger who brought the captain's note, she went up-stairs again and showed the note to Dorothy.

"What shall we do?" asked Dorothy with a pucker in her usually placid brow.

"Oh, give yourself no uneasiness," replied Sophy carelessly. "I sent him back a billet that will settle the matter. He has no desire to supplement his scarlet coat with a scarlet rash on his handsome face, I'll be bound."

Sophy was right, for Dorothy neither saw nor heard anything more of the gay young officer. Penelope's illness did not prove to be a severe one, and Dorothy felt that matters were going on well.

"Since this dear child has been none the worse, it is in truth a good thing that this illness came to send Mercy away to Newport," she remarked.

"Yes," replied Sophy. "She would not have gone, if she could have had her own way; but she needed the change, for she was growing listless and pale."

"The effect of the spring weather," replied Dorothy quickly. "Yes, the change will do her good."

Sophy had her own opinion about the cause of Mercy's pale and listless looks; but she had no intention of making it a matter of discussion, so she held

her peace and by silence gave consent to Mistress Dorothy's theory of spring lassitude.

When Jonathan arrived on the Saturday morning he found at home that the subject upon which he had been so anxiously debating within himself was still more closely forced upon him. On the preceding Monday the great event of the laying of the corner-stone of the new College building had taken place, and people from far and near had crowded to the festivities.

"Truly, I marvel that Nathanael did not strive to despatch his business so that he might have been here on the fourteenth," said Dorothy almost indignantly, "and you too have missed a sight that will not be seen again in our lifetime."

Jonathan tried to explain that his business had required and absorbed all his attention, but he made but a poor excuse, and every one was too eager to recount the events of the day to a new-comer who had not been present, to give much heed to what he said.

"A lovelier view I have never seen than that from the crest of the hill where they have digged the foundation," said Sophy.

"Aye," replied Dorothy; "'tis a beautiful site and well fitted for its purpose, both from the memories of the past and its own beauty, for it was the home lot you know of Elder Chad Brown. Mr. Moses Brown

has worked most zealously in this enterprise, despite his feeble health; and Mr. John Brown would not stop at the laying of the corner-stone, he would build the walls with his own hands, ere he would see the work fail!"

"There was grand feasting," said Reuben, "and some one treated the people with punch. Even in old England you would not do better than that, Aunt Sophy."

"I do not think that deserves much praise," remarked Dorothy. "Elder Thurston of Newport took a braver step when he refused to make rum casks, though he had but his coopering trade to support himself withal, and the casks were the best pay."

"Why did he do that?" asked Sophy with lively curiosity.

"Because he knew that the immense sale of rum from the Indies makes beasts of men, and he would do naught to further it," said Dorothy.

This was a degree of independent criticism that was quite beyond Sophy. She had looked with contemptuous scorn upon Rupert who was seldom in a condition to appear in the drawing-room after dinner, and she was glad that Nathanael had a stronger head and also valued his mental powers too highly willingly to befog them, but it never occurred to her to

question the established habit that proved too much for Rupert's weak system. It was the first law of hospitality in her English home, to furnish abundance of wines and strong waters; and any failure in this respect would have shocked her sense of propriety as greatly as if Nathanael had appeared in the pulpit without a wig, or Rupert had come to the dinner-table with his own hair unpowdered and the ribbon lost from his queue. She had never remarked on the limited use of such beverages at the Fythe Farm, as she was uncertain whether it was poverty, or some point of honor, as puzzling to her as the tea-question, that influenced her sister-in-law.

Now she simply held her peace and pondered over Dorothy's words and the subject dropped, for Jonathan rose to go, and Reuben, eager for more news about his journey to New York, took his hat to accompany him.

Jonathan however proved rather uncommunicative and they soon lapsed into a silence which Reuben at length broke with the fretful exclamation:

"I suppose all this learning and this new College is a fine thing, but I think it would be finer to act than to study just now. Uncle Rodman said it was a time for deeds, not for words, when he told us about the Boston massacre; and I am sure when the Baptists are so ill-used and imposed upon in all the other gov-

ernments, I would rather do some fighting for them than just sit down and study."

"You will fight none the worse for understanding thoroughly what you are going to fight about," remarked Jonathan.

"I mean to do that," replied the boy. "I know that President Manning says that young men will be better fitted for any life, be it by sea or by land, the pulpit or the compting house, but I know well that mother wants me to be a minister, and that is why she is so anxious for me to study. She has set her heart more than ever upon it since it is settled that the College is to be built here in our town. I wish she would let me be a soldier."

Jonathan did not reply for a moment. He had too much sense to attempt to argue with the restless spirit of adventure that was stirring the boyish blood in Reuben's veins; but he privately wondered if some of this restlessness were not the result of Captain Donnycourt's society. At last he said:

"It seems to me that we all get our share of fighting to do. I've had some pretty hard battles lately."

"Oh, yes, I know what you mean," answered Reuben, "but I mean real fighting and—adventures. Now you know, Jonathan, you would not like to be a minister yourself."

"I mean to be as soon as ever I can," replied Jona-

than quietly but decidedly. Then as Reuben looked at him, too much surprised to speak at once, he added hastily: "Here we are at Goody Drew's gate. I have not seen her since I came back. I must go in this morning. Good-bye."

He was afraid to listen to Reuben's answer to his announcement. It was only a short sentence to a thoughtless boy, and Reuben could not appreciate what the words meant to him; but it was a turning point in Jonathan's life. He had, as he said, fought a hard battle, and these words proclaimed which side had conquered. Even though it was only Reuben who heard him, the knowledge that he had announced his decision was a positive closing of the much debated question, and he walked homeward with clearer brain and firmer step.

He was sure that Reuben would repeat what he had said, but he also took an early opportunity to go again to the Fythe House and to tell Dorothy of his decision. Mercy's absence had been at first a disappointment to him, for he had secretly looked forward to reading approbation in her fair face if he could bring himself to decide as he knew that he ought. But now he felt that it was better that his decision should be a settled and well known fact before he met her again. And the honest and manly endeavor to do right for the sake of a higher than any earthly love

was not without its effect on the young man's spirit and bearing.

The following week Mercy returned from her trip to Newport. She certainly looked much better than she had done before she went, but Dorothy's eyes noted a change. There was something wrong with Mercy, though it was such an impalpable something that she could not even find anything to question about.

Dr. Manning was already settled in Providence, and had begun teaching in the Brick school-house on Meeting Street. The students gathered for prayers and recitations, and boarded at different houses in the town while waiting for the completion of the College building. Jonathan Pursell had therefore decided to begin a few studies at once, and to try to have his business finally disposed of in time to take a regular course as soon as the new building was opened. Mercy received the news of his decision with very evident pleasure; and the first evening that he came to the Fythe Farm after her return she greeted him so cordially and frankly that Dorothy was amazed. Even Nathanael, who returned the same week, thought:

"Here is another instance of Cupid's blindness. As soon as Pursell gives up the pursuit, Mercy is becoming interested in him. Though, in truth, it is

not surprising; for he is in every way greatly improved."

Only two people divined the truth. Extremes meet; and in this case, Mistress Sophy the most quick-witted and the most worldly wise of the party, and Jonathan, the slowest and the most simple-minded, arrived at the same conclusion.

"She would not be so frank and pleasant with him if she really cared for him," thought Sophy.

"She is kind to everybody, and she don't dislike me now that she feels sure that I am not trying to court her," thought Jonathan to himself.

On a peaceful evening in June, only a few days after Nathanael's return, the family were gathered in the house place. The hum of Dorothy's spinning-wheel drowned the voice of the bees that were droning past the open doors and windows, winging their way homeward from the clover field. Sophy's knitting-needles clicked as she plied Nathanael with questions about his visit to New York.

"Ask Mercy about Newport; she has seen a bigger and more bustling town than I," said Nathanael at last good-humoredly, checking the flow of queries.

Mercy, who, for a wonder, was sitting by the window with loosely clasped hands lying idly in her lap, started and answered hurriedly, as she turned her gaze from the yellow light in the evening sky:

"Yes, it is a bustling place. When I saw the crowded wharves and the ships going and coming and all the business going on, it seemed strange to me that our town should have carried the day about the College."

"I think it is fortunate for the College. This is the best place for it," answered Nathanael. "All the bustle, and business, and money-getting does not help a man to study, and that peaceful hill-top with its lovely view, is just the place for the Muses."

A shadow darkened the door-way as he spoke, and looking up he started to his feet with an exclamation of welcome, while Dorothy hastily pushed back her wheel and came forward with eager greeting.

"Mr. Smith, it is a glad sight to see you again on our door-step. Come in and tell us how you have prospered."

"Before I relate my experiences, may I ask to be presented to Mrs. Rodman," replied Mr. Smith as he entered the room and glanced at the little matron.

The introduction given, they again settled to quiet conversation, but Sophy's bright eyes were carefully noting from under their dark lashes the bearing, the features and the general deportment of the young man, and her husband's evident interest in his conversation.

"Truly you have worked hard for the founding of

the College," said Nathanael as he listened to Mr. Smith's account of his travels in the Southern governments. "I was saying even as you entered that its situation was well chosen."

"The best advantage that it has is, to my mind," said Mr. Smith, "the free Colony in which it has struck root. Here there are no oppressive taxations, no imprisonments to fetter and warp men's conscience. I would that the Colony of Massachusetts had the free and noble government of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations."

"I have heard that this government protects the Baptists," replied Nathanael, "and no doubt they flourish here in consequence."

"Nay," said Mr. Smith, "we ask no protection, unless you call it protection to give us free light and air. When men have been cooped up in dim chambers, heavy with the mould and dust collected on folios of creeds and dogmas, and sparsely lighted with smoky torches of other men's teaching, what they pine for is the freedom of God's beautiful earth. They long to see the flowers and the trees as he makes them grow, to breathe the pure air and to read his word by the light of the sun."

"Surely when you have just been engaged in collecting funds for this new College, you do not mean to say that you despise the learning of men," said

Nathanael with a slight approach to sarcasm in his tone.

"No indeed," replied Mr. Smith gravely. "I would that we should use every help that we can find in the study of God's word, but we must remember that they are but helps. If I cannot honestly say that I accept another man's interpretation of the Scriptures, I would desire to have free liberty for us to differ, and to question, until we solve our doubts."

"And if the other man by solving his doubts becomes a Methodist, or a Quaker, or mayhap even remains in the Church of England?" asked Nathanael, still with the same tone.

"Then let him follow his conscience," said Mr. Smith. "He were far better thus, than to become a Baptist because the State laws forced him to be such while his belief was not with them."

"There is something in that," replied Nathanael musingly.

The discontent fostered by his early training and surroundings in England led him to regard all enthusiasm with a touch of cynical contempt, but there was something in Mr. Smith's earnestness that was new to Nathanael. It was not crack-brained fanaticism, nor on the other hand, was he repeating a lot of truths that his conduct showed to have been learned by heart, but not with the heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SERMON BY REV. HEZEKIAH SMITH.

MR. SMITH was spending two days with his old friend Mr. Nicholas Brown before he returned to his church at Haverhill; and he had promised to preach on Tuesday evening in Mr. Winsor's meeting-house. Great was Sophy's surprise when her husband came to her on Tuesday afternoon with the remark:

"If you are minded to hear Mr. Smith preach this evening, I will put the pillion on Black Bess."

Merry Mistress Sophy had no great mind to hear anybody preach, unless it were Nathanael himself. And, even in those days when he appeared in the pulpit, her attention was so much given to a keen criticism of the behavior of the village children and a careful scrutiny of the clear-starching of Nathanael's bands, that all his sermons were equally good to her taste, and by the time she reached home she remembered nothing but the final invocation. But any proposal of Nathanael's was sure to meet with a cheerful assent from her, and the prospect of the ride to town and back again with him was really a powerful inducement.

The little Meeting House stood on Main Street and so near the water that in the spring and fall the high tides flowed nearly up to the west end. There were no pews, but benches were ranged on the sides of the aisle that extended from the front door to the pulpit. The pulpit was raised a few steps above the floor, and there was a gallery, but it was not used for orchestra or choir. Elder Winsor disapproved very strongly of singing at public worship. Although the house was small, it was not crowded, and Sophy and her husband easily found seats.

At first Sophy's glance wandered over the bare little Meeting House, and her observant eyes noted the freckles on the nose of the woman who sat beside her, and the funny little black wig that seemed in imminent danger of hopping off the rather large head of a man on the opposite bench. The preacher had announced his text and begun his sermon while Sophy's wits were still wandering; but her glance happening to fall on the earnest, absorbed countenance of Jonathan Pursell, she fell to speculating on the wonderful improvement that had taken place in him. Then seeing that her husband also was listening attentively, sheer curiosity induced her to pay some heed to the sermon. The text was from Revelation i. 7, "Behold he cometh with clouds." In a short time the volatile Sophy was listening with a strange feeling of awe,

that she could hardly understand. It made her uncomfortable, and she longed to shake it off. But her gay spirits did not rise to her rescue, as they usually did when anything uncomfortable was forced upon her mind.

Even when the preacher's voice ceased, when the little Meeting House was emptied and she was once more seated on the pillion behind her husband, she could not feel "like herself again," as she phrased it. The croak of the frogs in the pond as they passed; the stars glowing through the cool darkness of the June night; the dewy fragrance of roses and honeysuckles; the smooth exhilarating canter of Black Bess; all the trifles to which she was usually so keenly alive,—passed unheeded, so preoccupied was her mind by the earnest words of the preacher.

"What are you thinking of, Sophy? Your tongue is not often so long idle. If it is Elder Smith who has sent you into such a reverie, at least speak out your judgment," said Nathanael at last.

"What thinks my lord and master?" replied Sophy, with an attempt at her usual sprightliness.

"In truth, I hardly know," replied Nathanael musingly. "These Baptists are terribly in earnest."

Then they both relapsed into silence again. The familiar road, the dimly roused associations were all awakening in Nathanael boyish impressions and mem-

ories, that he had thought completely buried, if indeed he ever thought of them at all. And with it all he seemed to be regaining some of the eager readiness of a boy to receive impressions. He could not coolly and impassively criticise the evening's sermon as a piece of rhetoric, or a skillful composition. His mind reverted to the words "every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him." He no longer noted approvingly the fine presence of the preacher, his eloquent voice, his rich command of language. In spite of himself, his mind had been wholly turned to the matter of the discourse, and his thoughts were directed irresistibly to him who "cometh with clouds."

The next day Mr. Smith left Providence, but the impression that his words had produced was not destined to be lightly effaced.

Mr. Manning, Mr. Smith's friend and classmate, was now settled in Providence. Mr. Winsor had recently settled in the country and found it difficult to continue his duties as pastor and Mr. Manning had several times preached for them.

"I wish Mr. Manning would take Elder Winsor's place," said Reuben; "he does not think it a sin to sing. I would much rather listen to Aunt Sophy and Aunt Mercy singing, than to a long sermon."

"Take heed, lad," said his mother severely. "Such words ill become you. The salvation of the soul is

of more account, than the tickling of our ears with pleasing melodies."

Dorothy did not often speak so sharply, but Reuben had of late shown a questioning and fractious spirit that made her uneasy. His grandfather had very little comprehension of music; and as one tune was exactly like another to him, the whole vexed question of singing or no singing at divine worship excited about as much interest in his mind, as if you were to ask a blind man whether a house should be painted green or yellow. Mercy had inherited from her mother a sweet, though not powerful voice; and Dorothy, though she could not sing a note, felt a degree of pleasure in hearing "the child" trilling a gay little song over her work. But it was strictly a secular pleasure and nobody had thought of raising it of out of the place of a week day amusement until Sophy's arrival. She had a rich contralto and she often sang to Penelope. In deference to the feelings of her new relations she always chose hymns and Psalms for the Sunday. Mercy was once or twice induced to take the "first," and when Nathanael and Reuben showed interest in listening to them, Dorothy, though slightly bewildered and doubtful, did not like openly to oppose it. But now the matter was assuming greater importance, and she felt called upon to express her opinion decidedly.

"Elder Winsor lives too far off, and he thinks that his time is too much occupied," said Jonathan Pursell, who had dropped in as he often did. "And as he wishes to withdraw, I do not see that we could do better than to sit under the ministry of Elder Manning, if he is minded to accept a call from the church."

"I do not deny that Elder Manning has the gift of speech to a wonderful degree and the grace of God is with him," replied Dorothy, "but he holds loosely by certain points. There be those who say, that he practices the laying on of hands more to gratify the consciences of others, than to satisfy his own; and his views of singing at worship are not such as my father would have held with."

"But if the laying on of hands is not essential to salvation, and it cannot be, since the command is 'believe and be baptized,' that need not be regarded as a matter of great importance," urged Jonathan. "And we are told that David sang before the Lord. He is called you know the sweet singer of Israel. Surely we cannot be far wrong in making use of the gifts the Lord has given for his praise." He glanced as he spoke at Mercy, whose color had deepened nervously.

"Jonathan, beware; such light-minded argument is not fitting for one who is studying for the work of the ministry," said Dorothy. "Would you say that because David danced before the Lord, we should dance

up the aisle of the Meeting House, rather than go decorously and decently to our places. We are not living under the Mosaic Dispensation, and at this time when, as Mr. Brown said only last week, we can see nothing clearly in the future except the threatening clouds, sure it is meet for us to come before the Lord with fear and trembling, and to offer our prayer with humble and contrite hearts. You will tell us next that we should *sing-song* in Latin, like the Papists."

She was growing heated and Jonathan forebore to continue the discussion, which could do little good, and might do harm, since Reuben and Penelope were sitting by, doubtless eagerly watching who would come off victor, although their training forbade them to interfere when their elders were talking.

The question was, however, to be widely and hotly discussed before a larger audience; and many church meetings were held on the matter before a final decision was reached. Ten months later, in April of the following year, Mr. Winsor and a number of the members announced by writing their intention of withdrawing from the church, alleging as their reason that the members did not "hold strictly to the six principles of the doctrine of Christ laid down in Hebrews vi. 1, 2." In the following month Mr. Winsor joined the "Separates"; but when all this was going on Dorothy was not present to give her

voice on one side, or the other. For at that time the old Fythe Farm held only two inmates, Mercy, who shrank from any such discussions, and Reuben, who was hot and eager enough for debate, but, being not a church member and too young to give any opinion of weight, was not called upon to express his views.

Nathanael had never intended to take up his abode with his sisters and in all his recent travels he ever held in mind his intention to settle and make a home for his family with his own industry. Through Mr. Smith he had heard of a farm near Chelmsford not more than twenty-five miles from Haverhill, and further inquiries and a trip to Haverhill, whence he made a visit of inspection accompanied by Mr. Smith, led him to decide to purchase the land.

Dorothy at first opposed the change, but finding that Nathanael had fully made up his mind, she wisely gave up all opposition, and offered to go with them to help Sophy to settle in her new home. The offer was gladly accepted, and thus when Elder Winsor severed his connection with the Baptist Church in Main Street, Dorothy was in Massachusetts busily engaged in arranging furniture, looking after the cows and the butter making, and enlightening Sophy concerning many of the ingenious make-shifts and contrivances that must be practiced by those who begin life in a new country and with limited means.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST KNOT IN A TANGLED SKEIN.

THE time was well chosen for beginning their new home. The bright June sunshine, the green fields, the scenery so wild and new to eyes accustomed to the trim neatness of Southern England, all enchanted Sophy. Even the primitive little house that Nathanael looked upon with misgivings found favor in her eyes. She was well used to exercise her skill in dainty cookery in her old home and in the rectory kitchen at Rodmanhurst, and little Penelope asked nothing better than to be enveloped in a big holland pinafore with a little mob cap on her curly pate and armed with a duster and brush to chase ruthlessly every speck of dust that marred the simple furniture, or the painted floor and hearth-stone.

In the beginning of June they reluctantly said "good-bye" to Dorothy, who was to go as far as Boston with Mr. Smith and thence, after a short rest, to travel homeward with friends.

Mr. Smith was at that time making frequent visits to Boxford, where resided the lady who was shortly to become his wife; and both Dorothy and Mistress

Sophy had been not a little excited over the prospect of the arrival of the bride. But even this event could not induce Dorothy to postpone her return home, as it already seemed to her that she had left her "two children," as the mischievous Sophy called Mercy and Reuben, long enough to their own devices.

One bright morning about two weeks after her departure, Nathanael had gone out to the orchard and Sophy was standing at the kitchen table with her sleeves tucked up above her dimpled elbows, while little Penelope by her side was handing in turn the various ingredients for the pudding that was in process of concoction, with an expression of grave importance on her childish features, which showed her appreciation of the responsibilities of her duties.

A clatter of hoofs made Sophy glance towards the window.

"Who is that, Penelope, surely it is some one coming up our lane?" she asked.

"It may be Mr. Hezekiah Smith, who has ridden over to talk with father," replied the little damsel, looking towards the window with a pleased smile; for she was a pet with Mr. Smith, and always hailed his coming with delight, expressed in her own quiet way.

"Nonsense, child. Mr. Smith is riding in another direction to his wedding; 'tis more like to be Good-

man Tuft come to see the cow that thy father would exchange. Run to the front door while I finish the pudding, and tell him that father is in the orchard. But first ask him to be seated. Though, in truth," she added to herself, as Penelope disappeared to obey her injunctions, "I would rather postpone any gossip, be it ever so interesting until I had beat up a cake for Nathanael's supper this evening."

"And I should be loath to be held responsible for the spoiling of such a dainty, so perhaps I had better remain outside," said a voice behind her and turning with a start, she saw the face of Arthur Donnycourt peeping through the open window at her elbow.

"You foolish boy, what a fright you gave me," she exclaimed; "come in. Where have you been? What are you doing there?"

Arthur taking the invitation literally, at once proceeded to make his entrance by the open window and in so doing, as the window was not very large and his height was such as befitted his Majesty's service, he knocked his head, scraped his shoulders, and nearly knocked over the sugar-box that Penelope had set down on the corner of the table.

In spite of all these mishaps his eyes sparkled, and his cheeks glowed with gay excitement, that made Sophy wonder what had been his morning refreshments.

"Congratulate me, sweet cousin. I have won," he exclaimed eagerly, though his voice was not raised sufficiently for any one in the next room to hear.

"What do you mean, Arthur?" asked Sophy, a little sharply. "You come philandering in at the window, knocking over the table, and talking riddles, as though you had tasted something stronger than beer or cider at your breakfast."

"Nay, cousin mine," he answered with a merry glance that reminded her of the mischievous, bright-faced boy, who used to be her playmate; "it is but Dame Fortune who has extended to me an intoxicating cup of good luck. Strong waters and all the follies and pranks of my youth I have now renounced for the sake of my gracious mistress."

"How! What does this mean? For pity's sake explain, Arthur," cried Sophy, in excited curiosity.

A sudden change in Arthur's face and a motion of his finger to his lips stopped her just as Penelope's voice at the inner door said:

"There is a horse tied to the fence, but I see no——"

She stopped and gazed with astonishment at Arthur.

"Have you mislaid your manners, child?" said her mother. "Greet your cousin, and then run to the hen-roost, and see if you can find me a half dozen of new-laid eggs."

"Now," she added impatiently, as Penelope, having dropped her courtesy and spoke her greeting, again disappeared, "I am dying to hear your news."

"It is but this, cousin, that I have made good use of the hint you sent me and this lucky move of yours has given me another chance to press my suit with gentle Mistress Mercy; and now, at last, I have her promise that she will make me the happiest of men."

There was a gleam of real earnest feeling through all his gay levity that Sophy noted with a little frightened foreboding that she had been setting in motion a force that would not obey her control.

"What do you mean by 'the hint' and the 'lucky move?'" she asked, anxiously. "Mercy said naught of you in her letters. Have you been in Providence?"

"Aye, truly have I," he replied.

"And Mercy has betrothed herself to you without consulting Dorothy, and without writing to me?" she asked in a scandalized tone.

"Nay, she has written to you and I am the bearer of the letter," replied Arthur. "But, for Mistress Dorothy, what would you have? She considers me the arch fiend; and has spoken so hotly against me, that I had much ado to make any headway against her warnings; and in the end I only gained Mercy's promise by the assurance that I would do all in my

power to refute any of the wild stories that may be circulated against me, and by my circumspect behavior to win even Mistress Seaton's approval."

"But what do you mean to do? Are you going to take Mercy to England?" asked Sophy.

"Ah, there is where I need your counsel and your assistance, fair cousin," replied Arthur. "I must first write to my father and get what I can from him. And as it will not do to speak abruptly of a new daughter, it is a delicate matter."

"Yes, it is," assented Sophy. "But I do not see how I can help you."

For the first time she began to think seriously of the future before Arthur and Mercy. She knew very well that old Mr. Donnycourt would neither approve of a New England daughter-in-law, nor give any assistance to settling Arthur in a home under such circumstances.

"No, no, I can manage that part of the business myself," replied Arthur. "But I want you to help in managing the other side."

"Oh, do you want me to write to Dorothy? What a pity that I did not know sooner. It is much easier to speak than to write; and I could have won her over while she was with us," said Sophy.

"That is not so easy as you think," replied Arthur. "I never knew you so slow of comprehension, Sophy.

Don't you see that we must say nothing about the matter. If Mistress Dorothy, or your husband got wind of it, the next thing would be to ask about the settlements and the home I could supply; and I would be left with my finger in my mouth."

"Then you want to keep it secret?" said Sophy, inquiringly. "Mercy will never do that."

"Yes, she will," replied Captain Donnycourt, triumphantly. "She has promised. I told her that it would be only until I received an answer from England."

"But what if your father gives you no encouragement and promises nothing," asked Sophy.

She was becoming more and more anxious and sorry that she had set this stone rolling. Arthur, however, was all eagerness and impatience. Indeed Sophy was oddly and strongly reminded of the old days, when he was getting into scrapes, from which she first tried to dissuade him, and then followed him, with misgivings it is true, but also with a keen enjoyment of the fun. Now, however, in her position as a matron, she felt that she could admonish with authority, and she meant to act very prudently and wisely.

"You ought to be frank and open," she said gravely. "I shall certainly not aid you in leading Mercy into any entanglement of this sort."

"You never used to be one to throw cold water on good resolutions," retorted Arthur. "You have talked to me often about settling down and being steady, and now you would spoil my one chance."

He looked very disconsolate, and Sophy relented a little.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked doubtfully.

"Why just this," replied the young man, again brightening into eager speech. "Persuade Mercy to come here to visit you. Then I can sometimes see her without causing gossip to reach Mistress Dorothy's ears; and you can help us to make plans, as soon as the answer comes from my father."

"Do you suppose that I will help on a clandestine courtship?" exclaimed Sophy indignantly. "No, sir; if Mercy comes here, you must stay away."

Captain Donnycourt appeared to be about to expostulate, but he checked himself, and after a moment's thought, replied:

"That will be a cruel sentence, but I am more anxious for Mercy's comfort than for my own; and you can judge how distasteful it must be for her to meet constantly that fellow Pursell, while her sister favors his suit and is ever ready to speak ill of me. She would be much happier with you, and you could give her good counsel."

This little bit of flattery was not without effect. Sophy did not believe that Dorothy would play any such stern role, as Arthur seemed ready to assign to her. Still it was true that neither she nor Nathanael liked Donnycourt, and the romance of the whole situation began to influence Sophy now that she found herself brought in to act the part of wise adviser.

"I do not think that Mercy will come," she said; "at least not just now."

"But you will ask her?" interrupted Donnycourt eagerly.

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly; "but of course it is with the understanding that you are to stay away."

"Oh, yes, and . . . Is not that your husband?" he interpolated, as his glance, which, for some time, had been vigilantly directed towards the window, fell on a tall figure coming from the direction of the orchard. "Of course, I need not ask you to promise to say nothing to any one about what I have told you. You were always a discreet little woman and worthy of confidence," he added hastily.

"Certainly, I will not betray your confidence," replied Sophy, with a readiness that did not speak well for her discretion. The moment before she had fully intended to retain the right to keep this secret or not as she might judge best, but the eager, hasty words and Nathanael's approach flurried her.

Captain Donnycourt had already stepped out to meet Nathanael, and when he returned, this time entering decorously by the kitchen door and conversing with her husband in perfectly cool and composed tones about the news of the day, Sophy's chance for retracting or modifying her words was fled.

"It is a pretty piece of land; and certainly Mr. Hezekiah Smith did me a kindly turn in recommending it to my notice," Nathanael was saying.

"Aye," replied Donnycourt, "and you no doubt take heed not to become too much mixed up with these Antipedobaptists, or whatever the sextopedalian name may be, that they now use instead of plain Anabaptist."

"That is singular advice, methinks, when my husband's relations in this country are all Baptists," Sophy could not refrain from saying with a meaning glance.

"Ah, true, I remember to have heard that," said Donnycourt with imperturbable coolness; "but they are living under the Rhode Island Government, are they not? And that charter I have heard is so framed that there is little chance of the troubles of the Ashfield people befalling any religious sect in Rhode Island."

"The Rhode Island Government is in that respect a model for every other government," replied Na-

thanael quietly. "There would be a great hue and cry at home if we of the Church of England were taxed to support the Baptist preachers. Yet in truth such men as Dr. Manning or Elder Smith or Elder Gano are better worth supporting than many a parish priest who uses the Prayer Book."

"Nathanael!" cried Sophy, stopping in the very act of putting her cake in the oven—while she cast a warning glance towards Penelope.

"Run out and gather posies, Pen. You will lose your color if you stay in-doors in this bright weather," said her father. Then as the child went obediently out of the kitchen, he added: "There is no cause to look so horrified, Sophy. I do not mean to speak ill of our church, in which there are plenty of good and wise men. I only mean that people should not be taxed by the civil government to support any church."

"You would strike at the foundations of society, Mr. Rodman," said Captain Donnycourt carelessly. He cared little about the matter under discussion. His main object was to keep the ball of conversation going, until he could decently take leave, and also to avoid any subject that might lead Sophy by word or look to arouse her husband's suspicion concerning their previous *tête-à-tête*.

"Nay, I think the foundations of society were more

seriously disturbed when those quiet Baptist people in Ashfield had their lands taken from them a year ago last April, to be sold for taxes to support a Congregationalist minister. That might doubtless be styled oppression," said Nathanael; "and indeed it was downright cheating when the lands, valued at three hundred and sixty-three pounds lawful money, were sold for nineteen pounds three shillings."

"Ah, well, I have heard that they are moving heaven and earth to obtain redress," said Donnycourt; "and, doubtless, it will all be settled satisfactorily. It is rather odd, to say the least of it, that these good people of the colonies, who make such a sturdy resistance to any taxes laid on them by England, should be themselves taxing their weaker brethren."

"Aye, truly spoken," said Nathanael, thoughtfully. "It is taxation without representation that they complain of; and to tax one set of men to support the preachers for another set amounts to the same thing."

"I never heard so much about taxes in my whole life, as I have heard since we landed in this country," interrupted Sophy pettishly, forestalling the reply that Arthur was about to make.

"True," replied Nathanael good-humoredly; "the turn that our conversation has taken savors a trifle too much of law courts and political meetings to please the ears of ladies. You will stay to dine with us,

Captain Donnycourt, and we will strive to be more entertaining company. You said, did you not, that you are just from Boston? What are the gayeties that you can tell us of to enliven our seclusion?"

"I have been so short a time in the town that I have little news to tell, except this same political talk that one picks up at every tavern where a man may rest half an hour to refresh himself and bait his horse," replied Donnycourt; "but if I do not trespass on your kindness by accepting this invitation, the presence of so fair a hostess will surely inspire my dull wits. The society of a gentlewoman is a grateful relaxation from the tedious monotony of barrack life," he added adroitly, as he saw by Nathanael's face that the more pointed compliment was not well received.

Donnycourt's short visit passed more agreeably than the former visits to Rodmanhurst Rectory. Nathanael evidently was inclined to act with courtesy, but Sophy found slight comfort from that fact. She was too quick-witted not to perceive that any real liking between the two men was as remote as ever, and in the tone of Donnycourt's words concerning the Baptists she noted a careless indifference that spoke ill for any sympathy on that point between Mercy and himself. Poor Mistress Sophy was displeased all around. She was disturbed by the serious thoughtfulness with

which Nathanael spoke of the Baptists, as if they occupied a good deal of his attention; she resented Donnycourt's cool indifference on a subject in which her husband was evidently interested, and in which Donnycourt ought to be interested—so she argued—if he contemplated taking a bride of that way of thinking; and, worst of all, she had not the underlying support and comfort of feeling well pleased with herself.

She had no chance for private speech with Arthur until just as he was taking leave he found a moment to say in low, eager tones:

"Then I trust Mercy to you. You have the happiness of both in your hands, and with no one could I feel it to be safer."

He bowed low over her hand and was gone before Sophy could utter any expostulation. She was not even quite sure that she wished to expostulate. When Captain Donnycourt laid aside his careless airs, there was a frank and confiding boyishness about him that made him almost irresistible; and the look of respect and gratitude that had met Sophy's glance as he spoke, touched both her heart and her vanity. Was it then any great marvel that her judgment was lulled to sleep?

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT TO THE BRIDE AT HAVERHILL.

SOPHY had never before intentionally kept any matter of importance a secret from her husband. For a few days after Captain Donnycourt's sudden visit she felt intensely uncomfortable, and so grievously annoyed and perplexed, that she dared not make any suggestion concerning an invitation to Mercy, lest she should betray this hidden uneasiness and lead Nathanael to question her. At last she began to feel that she must have some one with whom she could talk freely, and she plucked up courage to broach the subject to her husband.

"I do not see exactly how we can arrange for Mercy to make the journey," he replied, "but it will do no harm to write to her or to Dorothy. You have been a trifle down in spirits since Dorothy left us, but cheer up, sweetheart. You have been a brave little housewife in all this work of moving, and we will manage to get Mercy to make the place more lively for you now."

"I thought it would be a pleasant change for Mercy; it was she who seemed to me low-spirited

since her return from Newport last year," said Sophy vexed that she should have given her husband the impression that his society was not enough for her.

"Ah, you thought so?" said Nathanael; "I too fancied something of the sort. Well, well, write your billet and I will try to find a trusty hand to take it to Boston."

He went away thoughtfully, and Sophy was left to fret her soul with vain queries, as to whether he could have heard or suspected aught concerning Donnycourt's meeting with Mercy in Newport.

Nathanael's thoughts, however, ran in a very different direction. He connected Mercy's depression with Jonathan Pursell's determination to devote himself to the ministry, and his consequent inability to press his suit for her hand.

"Was I right, or was I wrong in the influence I tried to exert over his decision? If he had not come to this resolution, she never would have respected him, and he never would have respected himself. Yet I did not wish to cause her any unhappiness. Truly it is a strange world," he mused; "the more ardently we seek to attain happiness either for ourselves or for our friends, the more persistently it eludes our grasp. Elder Smith would tell me that it is not happiness that we should make our object. Then if it be goodness, what is goodness? Have not I borne a good

reputation through difficult and exasperating circumstances? No man would speak ill of me. Even Rupert, who would gladly pick holes in my coat, could find nothing but paltry silly cavilings. Yet what a shame I felt of myself! 'Tis only now, when I have, as the Church would say, disgraced my profession, that the fire within me burns less fiercely and I begin to feel like an honest man. I would that Elder Smith were returned from his wedding jaunt that I might hold some discourse with him on this subject."

During the last few months there had been frequent intercourse between these two, but Nathanael's questions and arguments had always been in the abstract; he never made or invited any personal allusions. Mr. Smith was acute enough to surmise that many of the supposititious cases brought forward by Nathanael were really the actual battles and questionings of his own inner life, but he was too wise to make any attempt to force confidence.

Mr. Smith's marriage, which took place late in June, and the subsequent visiting among his wife's relations and friends, though of course it occupied his mind, had not made him forgetful of his new friends. When on the eleventh of July he had brought his wife home, and the interrupted routine of life had been taken up again, he looked forward with much interest to the visit of congratulation which he was

well assured the Rodmans would not be slow to make, even though they lived at a distance and were not members of his church and congregation.

He was not mistaken in his expectations; for little more than a week had passed since the newly married pair were settled in their home, when Nathanael remarked one Saturday morning to his wife:

"Can you get ready to ride over with me to Haverhill to-morrow morning? It is time we paid our respects to the bride, and I would that we could arrive in time to hear Mr. Smith preach."

The proposition did not meet with the usual ready and cheerful assent from Sophy. Captain Donnycourt's talk had alarmed her, and she noticed with dread her husband's evident inclination to attend the Baptist meeting.

"What will become of Penelope?" she asked. "We cannot take her along."

"Nay, truly; thou art getting too big a girl, Pen, for Black Bess to carry treble," replied her father as he chucked the sedate little maiden under the chin. "What shall we do with thee?"

"Mount me on Old Tom, father!" replied Penelope promptly, while a gleam of mischief sparkled in her demure brown eyes. "I will engage to make him keep pace with Black Bess."

"Fie, for shame, Penelope!" cried her mother. "Thou art a veritable little hoyden, riding the horses about the fields; but what will pass in our own lane and meadow will never do on the high road."

"There, there, lass," said Nathanael good-naturedly, as he noted her crestfallen look; "some day I'll take thee on the pillion behind me. But, let me see—she might go to Goodwife Folinsbee to-morrow," he added as he turned again to his wife.

Elspeth Folinsbee was the wife of a Scotchman, who owned a small tract of land adjacent to Nathanael's farm, and who was frequently hired by the owners of larger farms to bring himself and his team to assist in the harvest or at seeding time.

"I have no time to see her about the matter," replied Sophy doubtfully. "Could we not go on Tuesday or Wednesday?"

"Nay, with the haying and harvesting at hand, 'tis the only day I can give," said Nathanael decidedly. "Besides, I should miss the sermon if we went any day but Sunday, for I know naught about their week day meeting."

Sophy did not dare to say that this was just what she desired; so she held her peace, and her husband added:

"I'll send word to Elspeth; and I warrant she will be glad enough to see the little puss. So get out your

best bib and tucker, and be ready for an early start to-morrow. Oh, now I think of it, 'tis the very time to send the letter to Dorothy. We can take it to Haverhill, and Mr. Smith will find a trusty hand to take it on to Boston to be forwarded by post. Have you written yet?"

This letter had in fact been composed with more anxious care and debate than Sophy had ever before bestowed on one of her ill-scrawled missives. She feared to write to Mercy direct, or to make the slightest allusion to Donnycourt, lest Dorothy's suspicions should be excited; only a little postscript to Mercy was added under the seal, urging her to come; and the letter folded, sealed, and directed had lain in Sophy's desk for several days, awaiting a convenient opportunity to start it on its way southward. Many times Sophy had been tempted to take it out and burn it; but now the opportunity for that was past. To her husband's direct question, she could only answer:

"Yes, the letter is sealed and addressed."

"I hope you wrote very persuasively. We really must have Mercy with us for a time," he said, pleasantly, then he went out to meet Douglas Folinsbee in the hay field and to send word to Elspeth.

That matter was easily settled. Elspeth had helped in setting their new home in order, and had even, at Nathanael's request, bought for them sundry

articles of kitchen and household furnishing at the vendue of the former owners of the farm, before Sophy appeared in the neighborhood at all. Thus she felt a special interest in the welfare of the new inmates. Dorothy's skill and knowledge in household matters had gained her admiration and respect; but, as is not unusual with notable housewives, her heart was won by the more inexperienced Sophy, and the demure little maiden, whom she called "a canny wean" was the joy of her heart. It was her pride and pleasure to be called upon for advice or assistance; and being a good-hearted woman and specially wise in culinary and other housekeeping art, Sophy found her a most useful neighbor.

On this particular Sunday morning Elspeth appeared soon after sunrise to offer help in the morning work and to take Penelope home with her to breakfast, after her parents had had their early "bit and sup," and Black Bess with her double burden, had started at a gentle canter down the lane.

The fresh dewy morning, the early sunbeams gleaming in the short wet grass by the dusty roadside; the breeze rolling in green billows the wide stretching fields of tall grass yet waiting for the hay harvest; the deep blue of the sky overhead, only broken by a few feathery clouds near the horizon, flung off like down from his bed as the sun rose; the twitter and

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chirp of the birds seeking for the proverbially early worm,—all brought light and gladness to the merry and healthy little matron perched on the pillion. Her eyes grew brighter, her cheeks took on a deeper pink, and she looked like one who had not a care in the world. It was not acting, nor was it thoughtless forgetfulness, that caused Sophy's vexation with Donnycourt and her anxious forebodings concerning Mercy to dwindle, like the shadows before the rapidly mounting sun. Most of our troubles are visible or invisible, according to the atmosphere through which we look at them. It is but rarely that we come upon a sorrow or a trouble that wraps us in its own dark and heavy atmosphere, through which nothing but the light of God's own presence can penetrate to bring light and comfort.

Now in this beautiful fresh morning it was impossible for her not to believe that all would come right in the end, whatever might take place in her feelings when the fierce noonday glare had drunk up the sparkling dewdrops and laid a heavy hand on the throat of the breeze, leaving nothing to relieve the July heat and dust.

They reached Haverhill in time to alight, and to present their compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Smith before proceeding to the meeting-house, and of course the unfailing invitation to dinner was urged and ac-

cepted. In that day few but the judges on circuit were expected to eat or sleep at a tavern, when on their travels, and one venerable host notes that on account of advanced age he has to restrict his household, and those that dine under his roof average but seventy daily.

Mrs. Hezekiah Smith they find to be a person of prepossessing appearance and manners, who by her tact and good sense wins both the grave Nathanael and his volatile little wife. But in truth after the dinner hour is over the ladies see little of Nathanael or of Mr. Smith. When the shadows are lengthening and Black Bess stands again at the door, the gentlemen come into the parlor from Mr. Smith's study and Nathanael after making his farewell acknowledgments to the hostess, turns to Mr. Smith, saying:

"I thank you most heartily for all your words today, both in the pulpit and in private."

"God grant that they may bring a blessing to you," responded Mr. Smith, with a warm clasp of the hand.

Before Sophy could well understand, or grasp the meaning of this, she was again mounted behind her husband, and Black Bess was stepping out on the homeward way almost as freshly as in the early morning. Sophy waited nervously for her husband to speak, and soon he said, as if pursuing a train of thought:

"In a new country, one feels like taking up a new life, and leaving behind all the dust and travel marks of the old. What do you think, Sophy?"

"I don't think that I understand exactly," said Sophy doubtfully. "Was that what kept you so long talking with Mr. Smith?"

"True, true, how should you understand? Your innocent heart has no travel marks," said Nathanael patting the little hand that clung to his belt. "But I am not as good as you, Sophy."

There was a curious almost pathetic ring in his voice, that made Sophy feel as if the solid earth was being strangely turned around. Kindly indulgence was nothing new. She had received that from her husband ever since she knew him; but that he should seem to appeal to her as above himself gave her a strange thrill of pain, quickly followed by a passionate desire to give him the sympathy he craved.

"You are always kind and good to me, and I am not good," she cried with anxious eagerness. "You often stopped me when I scolded about Rupert."

Nathanael smiled sadly. What were her little tempests in a tea-cup compared to the deep silent hatred and envy that had rankled in his heart? He had not checked her outbursts from any desire that she should feel kindly towards his cousin's family. It was rather from a feeling of the inadequacy of

such expressions and their utter fruitlessness. Still he could not but be touched by her evident longing to comfort him, and it led him to say more.

"It is small credit to me to be good to you, Sophy," he replied, as he lifted the slender fingers from his belt and kissed them with a gallantry that Arthur Donnycourt himself could not have surpassed, and a sincerity to which the gay captain seldom, if ever, attained; "but I have thought much of late of actual goodness, of goodness as God sees and judges. I would give a great deal to win that, to feel that I was clean in his sight."

He did not speak with any excitement; on the contrary he seemed very calm, but there was a ring of intense earnestness in his voice that startled Sophy. She had seen him excited, indignant, over provocation or injustice to himself or to others; but that did not affect her; she knew that it would pass over, and to her he would be just the same. Now it was something different. She had a foreboding that this new earnestness meant a complete change in her husband; something that would make a gap between them.

"Oh," she thought, "if I only knew what to say to him! If I knew how Mr. Smith talked to him!" but in her bewilderment and desperation she could not even think of a text of Scripture to quote. At last she said in a timidly suggestive way:

"Would you be willing to read prayers in the evening? In the morning there is hardly time, but we could arrange very well after supper, if you are not too tired."

"Yes," replied Nathanael, after a moment of hesitation; "I ought to have suggested that myself; I will do it."

"And on Sunday morning you might read the Collect for the day and the Lessons," continued Sophy; "I try to make Penelope read them with me, but we do not always remember."

"Perhaps," said Nathanael, "it might not always be convenient. I could not have done it on this Sunday for instance."

"But this ride is an exception. It would be a good thing for Penelope," said Sophy.

Why did she persist, was it entirely for the reasons she gave, or was she hoping to weaken Mr. Smith's influence and to hold together that dreaded gap? If it was, she did not as yet own it to herself.

Nathanael gave no thought to any such questions. When he became interested his mind was fully absorbed by the subject before it, and he did not stop to suspect or question on any apparently irrelevant matters. Sophy was evidently sympathizing with him after her way and according to her lights, and in the newly awakened longing for something better and

nobler than he had yet attained to in life, he poured out to her those feelings and aspirations that he had never before mentioned.

"It has been all a sham and a deceit before," he said at last, "but now I want to begin at the very beginning and to be true throughout. I told Mr. Smith that I would not again show insult and irreverence to God by offering to him less than the whole strength and purpose of my heart and life. He commended me in that, but he bade me beware that I did not act falsely in feigning an indifference to matters of religion which lay not in my heart. He said that we were always prone to run to extremes, because we were unwilling to show ourselves as the ignorant and doubting creatures that we really are; and he bade me search the Scriptures diligently as the only guide. Thy suggestion chimes well with his, little wife, and together we will give heed to it."

The glow of the summer sunset had faded as they thus talked, unheeding the time. The stars were glimmering in the dusky sky and the sleepy music of the frogs and the katydids, with an occasional twittering chirp from a dreaming bird, or a crowded nestling filled the warm stillness of the twilight as they cantered up the lane to their own house door.

"You are tired with the long ride," said Nathanael

as he carefully swung Sophy's light figure to the mounting-block. "Send the little lass to bed and we will close the house betimes."

The new light in which he was viewing his own conduct made him repent of the sullen thoughts he had cherished against his wife, while on the journey to and from New York. He took himself to task none the less severely because he could not ask her forgiveness, and his manner towards her was more than usually tender and considerate. Sophy was trembling, it is true, but it was not from the fatigue of the ride, nor was it the visit to Mrs. Smith that kept her brain thinking, planning, wondering in bewildered excitement, long after she had laid her head on the pillow.

CHAPTER XI.

SUCCESS OF DONNYCOURT'S PLAN.

THE long hot days of July were over; and August, with its cooler nights and its fields whose yellowing tints seemed to indicate that they had drunk their fill of the golden sunlight, gave gentle reminder that summer was waning.

All went on peacefully at the new home near Chelmsford. Nathanael's new thoughtfulness did not make him gloomy; on the contrary he was brighter and happier than Sophy had ever known him. The evening prayers had become a regular event in the day, and the Sunday reading was often added at times when they found it difficult to get to church. But Sophy, while she rejoiced at her husband's increased happiness and contentment, noted with foreboding that his interest tended more to the Baptist than to their own church, and that the Bible was more and more used, as the Prayer Book was almost imperceptibly superseded. She once said after a visit from Mr. Hezekiah Smith when he had by request taken Nathanael's place at evening prayers and had offered *extempore* prayer:

"Mr. Smith has fine command of language, but I think nothing can equal our own beautiful prayers that bear so many sacred associations."

"They are beautiful and hallowed as you say," replied Nathanael, "but, Sophy, if you were praying for my life in serious illness would you think of the beauty, or would you cry out in the language of your own heart to God for help."

"The words of our prayers and collects are so familiar that they would come to me naturally," replied Sophy; but she felt that it was not an honest answer; indeed, the bare thought of Nathanael's life being in danger seemed something that her mind could not grasp. A few days later, when she again referred to "our church," Nathanael replied:

"I am not a member of any church, Sophy. How can one who is not really a Christian belong to any Christian church?"

"But, Nathanael, think of your baptism, of your confirmation, of your—" She stopped, hesitating at the word she was about to say, but Nathanael finished the sentence.

"Of my ordination, you would say. Aye, Sophy, I have thought long and often of all these. And what if the first two be as unmeaning a farce as the last."

"Oh, it is Rupert who is to blame for all these

dreadful thoughts that come to you," cried Sophy, passionately.

"No, no," said Nathanael hastily. "I will never try to shift my sins on another man's shoulders. Would 'a child of God, a joint heir with Christ,' as the Prayer Book hath it in the baptismal service, hazard his Father's anger and place his birthright in jeopardy to gratify an envious spite against a fellow mortal?"

"Penelope ofttimes angers me, but she is none the less our child," said Sophy driven to unwonted attempt at logic by her distress.

"Ah, but that is different," said Nathanael sadly. "I was not born a child of God, I was baptized such, and, truth to tell, I think that I was nearer to God when living with my mother, than after the day when my grandfather said that I must get ready to be baptized in Rodmanhurst Church, since doubtless both Christianity and civilization were little considered among the American savages."

"But you think differently now," urged Sophy.

"I hope I do. I mean to," said Nathanael doubtfully. "But all that time I was pretending to be what I was not, or rather other people pretended for me, since it was none of my wish or arrangement."

He broke off the conversation here, but Sophy could not fail to see whither he was tending.

A letter had come from Dorothy, but no definite plan had been arranged for Mercy's visit, for none of their friends happened to be at that time going to Boston, and Mercy could not travel alone. Sophy was more relieved than disappointed, but Nathanael was not content thus to let the matter rest. He learned that Mr. Smith expected to go to Providence in the latter part of August, in order to attend the Commencement exercises, and he took occasion to ride over to Haverhill with a letter, which he requested Mr. Smith to deliver to Dorothy, and to use all his persuasions to induce Mercy to return with him.

He had also, during this visit, a long conversation with Mr. Smith on matters of religion, and the result was that Nathanael returned home with a heart more at ease than he had known for years, and the good minister started southward with the consciousness that he had news for the two sisters that would greatly cheer their hearts, concerning their half-brother.

He reached the home of his old friend in Providence Mr. Nicholas Brown, on the twenty-eighth of August and, as he could remain only two nights, Mr. Brown insisted that Jim, a bright negro boy, should be despatched with the letter to Mistress Seaton.

"I promised to use my own best endeavors to persuade Mistress Mercy to comply with their request that she should make them a visit," said Mr. Smith; "and

I would speak with them concerning their brother. I trust that his eyes are being opened to perceive the grace of God towards repentant sinners, and that he will soon be enabled to lay hold of the promises, and to find in them peace and comfort to his soul."

"I am heartily glad to hear such things," replied Mr. Brown; "and I know it will greatly rejoice our good friends. Mistress Seaton spoke to me on that subject a few weeks since, and at the time she remarked upon a certain restlessness and disinclination towards all matters of religion that she had noted in Reuben during the constant intercourse with his uncle's family. She also noted a depression of spirits in her sister, and these things caused her to question whether it would be well for the spiritual welfare of either should they accept the kind invitations of Mr. and Mrs. Rodman to visit them in their new home."

"She would find a great change in that respect in the household," replied Mr. Smith; "and it is probable that the effort to help and cheer her brother might be the surest means of reviving Mistress Mercy's drooping spirits and strengthening her faith."

"Then let me despatch Jim at once with the letter," said Mr. Brown; "Mr. President hopes to confer with you to-morrow, as he has much on which to consult with you concerning the Commencement next week. And if, as you say, you must go on to New-

port on Friday, Mrs. Brown will try her persuasions during your absence."

Mr. Smith agreed to this arrangement, as it was evidently impossible for him to find the time to go out to the Fythe Farm at this time. He wrote a few lines which he enclosed with Nathanael's letter in a packet and the whole was given to Jim, who set off at once on a smart run to fulfill his errand.

"He is a bright, active, little fellow," said Mr. Smith watching him.

"Yes," replied Mr. Brown; "a great deal more active than old Pete, so I am training him to run errands. He is a little thoughtless, but he is never intentionally careless."

The two gentlemen went back into the house, just as Jim's quick feet slackened their pace. A low whistle had attracted his attention. He looked towards the house, but the door had closed behind his master; and he was in doubt as to whether the whistle was intended as a signal to himself when a dusky face peeped out from a narrow alley near to which he stood, and an unsteady voice called in low tones:

"Jim! Where goin'?"

"Hullo, Sam, dat you? Is cap'n come back?" inquired Jim.

"No, no, but where you goin' in such a pow'ful hurry?" replied Sam, coming a little nearer.

"Dar you's been at it agen," exclaimed Jim in tones of deep disgust. "I never seed a nig so bound to kill hisself on rum. Cap'n 'll get rid of you for shua 'for' long. And jist serve you right too."

"Do'n' cut up like that, Jim, when you might do a pore fellah a good turn," said Sam in a sniveling whine.

"What you want?" retorted Jim, "I ain't no time to fool wid the likes of you," and he cast a glance of such withering scorn, as only negroes know how to mete out to each other.

"'Tain't my fault," began Sam. "Massa he tole me to tak' this letter an' give it to Miss Mercy Fythe, an' I tuk it—'pon my sole, I did—but she wouldn't luk at me, she jist walk away fast to the house and I dassant go up to the do', for massa he say 'give it to hersel' quiet, Sam.' But how is I to give it to hersel' if she walks away? I ax you dat."

"Any lady 'ud walk away from that smell o' rum," retorted Jim, still with haughty superiority.

Sam was nettled by it at last and answered sharply:

"If you's goin' to ak like dat, I'll jist tak mysel' off. Think I'd go drinking 'for' I went up dar wid the letter? Sho!"

"What do you want then?" answered Jim.

"I jist thought mebbe you could get the letter to her. I'd jist hang roun' an' see it all right, and then

go back to de cap'n an' tell him its all right. I is clean 'feared to take it back to him, and that's what set me to drink, 'pon my word; Jim, dat's true. I'd give you that rather'n anger the cap'n," and Sam mysteriously lowered his voice and showed the gleam of a small silver coin in his dark palm.

"Wull, I don' care if I do," replied Jim slowly relaxing from his high and mighty tone, and Sam quickly whipped out the sealed packet addressed to Mistress Mercy Fythe.

A slight altercation followed as to whether payment should be made before or after the service was rendered, but Jim was too wary to yield that point and the silver piece, reluctantly on Sam's part, changed hands. Then Jim scampered off through the deepening twilight, trying to make up for lost time by extra fleetness of foot.

Mercy sat on the porch ostensibly knitting, Dorothy was on the chair beside her and Reuben was sitting on one of the steps of the porch, while Jonathan Pursell leaned against one of the posts. The talk ran principally upon the approaching Commencement exercises but Mercy hardly heard what was said.

Sam was quite honest in saying that he had not been drinking before he went to the Fythe Farm, and that was not Mercy's reason for avoiding him. She had forbidden Donnycourt to write to her, and ever

since his departure, between a natural longing to hear news of him, and a fear that she had acted wrongly in giving him any encouragement, her nerves and spirits were becoming sadly weak and variable.

When that afternoon she saw Sam approaching her as she was watering the rose-bushes, she guessed at once what brought him there. She had seen him in Newport and recognized him as Captain Donnycourt's servant. If Dorothy happened to look from the window and saw her talking to the man, she would be questioned, she knew; and in truth Mercy was not the material out of which to make a heroine of a romantic adventure, for almost involuntarily she turned and went into the house as fast as she could without actually running away. She saw Sam loiter about and then go on and disappear around the bend in the road, and as soon as he was fairly out of sight and her nervous dread lest Dorothy should notice him was relieved, she began to imagine all sorts of mishaps that might have befallen Arthur, and to feel that she would give anything to get possession of the letter with which she suspected that Sam had been entrusted. It was no wonder that she could not sit still listening to Jonathan and Dorothy's talk and quietly knitting. After one or two distraught answers when she was addressed, she got up and sauntered down the little path to the gate.

Dorothy called to her, as the twilight deepened, to put on a shawl, but she did not heed, and stood watching the stars slowly twinkling out in the blue vault above her, and striving to calm her harassed mind. The pat pat of bare feet on the dusty road gave her a start and she discerned Jim coming along at a lively pace, he slackened his steps and pulled himself into order as he approached, but a very little was enough to make her tremble now.

"It's a letter please for Miss Seaton as massa tells me to bring wid Massa Smith's compliments, and he'll call hissel' when he comes back from Newport," said Jim fumbling with the two packets.

"Oh," said Mercy, "Mrs. Seaton is on the porch," and she opened the gate to let him pass. She was too conscious of her own unreasonable start and tremulousness to care to meet Dorothy's keen glance herself, but she found that Jim was trying to slip a packet into her hand and fortunately she took them both, for in his haste and inexperience in such matters he was on the point of giving Mr. Smith's letter to Mercy and carrying Captain Donnycourt's to Dorothy.

Even in the dim light Mercy recognized the writing and the seal on Donnycourt's letter and she slipped it hastily into the pocket that hung at her side, before Dorothy, who had heard her own name, came forward to get her letter, and to take the boy to

the kitchen, for a rest and a mouthful of supper before he went back again.

Now that the letter was fairly in her possession, forced upon her almost in spite of herself, Mercy's impatience could not be restrained. While Dorothy was making slow and stately preparations to read her epistle; inviting Mr. Pursell to enter and hear word of Mr. Smith; striking a light and lighting the candles in the tall silver candlesticks, Mercy had flown up-stairs to her own room and with trembling fingers had broken the seal.

The amount of ink in proportion to the words was very large as Captain Donnycourt's detestation of writing was sufficient to make even his love-letters concise and to the point. And possibly he intended by the softness of the quill pen he used to indicate delicately the state of his heart. At all events the lines were heavy enough for Mercy's young eyes to decipher them by the moonlight that was shining in at the eastern window.

My Darling:—I cannot live longer without seeing your sweet face. Have you forgotten your promise? If you cannot go to your brother's, I must come again to the Farm. Three long months of absence have made me desperate. Send at least one line I pray you to

Your devoted adorer, A. D.

Mercy turned cold as ice as she read these lines.

If she had not received them, he would have come himself! The thought of her sister's displeasure was more terrible to her after these months of silence than it would have been had she from the first made known Donnycourt's attentions to her. Dorothy's voice calling to her aroused her before she could decide what to say or do. She went down-stairs in a misery of doubt as to what she should do, or how she should answer Donnycourt. The reading of Nathanael's letter and the brief note from Mr. Smith seemed to offer a direct solution of all her anxieties. When the first invitation from Sophy came she was relieved by the thought that she need not accept it at once, for she knew that Donnycourt counted upon this, as a means of having freer intercourse with her. Now she looked forward with satisfaction to any release from the secrecy and anxiety that were oppressing her.

"While the boy is resting himself, I will write a line to thank Mr. Smith for his courtesy, and to ask him to stay with us on his return from Newport," said Dorothy. "It is indeed joyful tidings that he sends us, and I think Mercy it is, as he says, an opportunity for you to do much good. So I hardly feel justified in keeping you here, much as I shall miss you. What say you, dear?"

"I will go," replied Mercy, in low tones.

The difference between her own and her sister's thoughts struck her painfully. She could not tell how it was, but she seemed to be drifting helplessly wrong; and to talk of her doing good to any one seemed sadly incongruous. Just now, while Dorothy's heart was full of sisterly joy and sympathy with Nathanael, she was perplexing herself as to how to get word to Donnycourt that would hinder him from coming to Providence. She picked up a sheet of letter paper, as Dorothy was arranging her writing materials, and wrote hastily in pencil:

I am going to my brother's. M. F.

Then she slipped out to the kitchen while Dorothy was writing, and questioned Jim as to how he got possession of the second letter that he had given her. Finding that Sam was still in Providence, she relinquished a vague idea of sending an answer by Jim, and merely bade him tell Sam that she wished to see him the next morning. Here was now an opportunity to write a more satisfactory letter to her lover, but although Mercy had so many hours before her, and although she slept little that night, the missive that was intrusted to Sam the following morning contained not one line more than the hastily penciled words. She could not bring herself to write.

CHAPTER XII.

MERCY'S VISIT TO CHELMSFORD.

THE sun had set in a glory of crimson and gold, and the big round September moon was just lifting her face, also crimson but with a reflected and placid glow, above the hill of tasseled maize that bordered the eastern horizon as seen from Nathanael Rodman's front door. The calm moon looked down upon an unusually bustling scene. Horses were stamping, voices were raised in eager welcome and rapid questioning and the whole household was in a state of excitement over the arrival of the long-expected guest. Nor had Mercy come alone. Reuben had been sent as her escort, since it could not conveniently be arranged that she should travel entirely under Mr. Smith's care, as he had to stop on the way to attend the Association at Sutton. It was therefore settled that Reuben and Mercy should go by stage-coach to Boston and Nathanael had ridden in on Black Bess and with a led horse, in order to fetch the travelers the remaining twenty-five miles to Chelmsford. Reuben was in the highest of good spirits over his new dignity, but poor Mercy looked sadly worn and

fatigued. Without delay Sophy carried her off to rest and to brush off the dust of the journey in the little room that had been prepared for her, but no sooner were the two alone, than Mercy threw her arms about her bright little hostess and dropped her weary head on her shoulder while deep sighs that were almost sobs shook her frame.

"There, darling, you are overtired," said Sophy kindly, as she untied the strings and took off the veil and traveling hat which partly concealed Mercy's features. "Come and bathe your face; it will refresh you. I will run and fetch my sal volatile."

But Mercy shook her head and tried to smile, though she dared not yet trust her voice. After a minute she seemed to recover herself, and having bathed her face, she said with an attempt at brightness:

"I did not think I should be so silly. Don't ask me to explain now. The journey upset me, and I was so afraid that I should cry and set everybody wondering and questioning me about my red eyes. Don't take any notice of my foolishness. I will tell you everything after awhile, when we can be alone and quiet for a time."

Sophy was both relieved and surprised at the resolute control that Mercy put upon herself. It showed the gentle, sensitive maiden in a new light to her. But she readily took the cue given her and chatted

gayly about every-day matters. Meanwhile she helped to arrange the glossy hair and to set off the plain traveling dress with a few skillful touches of her deft fingers. They had brought only such articles as would go in the saddle-bags; the heavier things were left to come by the carrier the following day.

In a short time Mercy was ready to present herself in the dining-room, where supper was waiting. She went through the meal with her usual quiet manner, but a chance word from Reuben explained to Sophy her previous agitation. He was eagerly denying that it had been at all a fatiguing journey:

"I am not tired one bit and I enjoyed myself all the time," he asserted, "but particularly after Captain Donnycourt got into the stage at Attleborough. It was good fun to listen to his stories, and to hear him quiz the other passengers."

Sophy glanced apprehensively first at Mercy and then at her husband. The former was outwardly perfectly calm and composed, but she said nothing and did not lift her eyes. Nathanael, on the contrary, looked up just in time to catch his wife's eye, as she glanced at him and he remarked pleasantly:

"Ah, yes, he is a capital companion when he tries to be agreeable and entertaining. I am sorry that I did not know he was still in Boston, and look him up."

This was meant as an *amende honorable* for the sharpness that he used to display whenever Donnycourt's name was mentioned.

Reuben, who, at former times, had been snubbed by his uncle whenever he mentioned the gay captain would now have eagerly continued his favorite theme, but Sophy adroitly turned the conversation. She had the clue now to Mercy's agitation, and she determined at the first opportunity to persuade the young girl to confide to her the actual state of affairs between herself and Donnycourt.

Mercy had regained her usual composure; indeed Reuben's mention of Donnycourt had done her good rather than harm, for she had been dreading remarks and questions from Nathanael when the matter should be mentioned. Now it was all over and done with, in the simplest and most natural way, and she breathed more freely.

They were sitting quietly together after supper, the candles had been lighted, and Sophy had just gone up-stairs to say a last good-night to Penelope; and Reuben, who was sleepy from the effects of his journey and his hearty supper, was nodding perilously in a high straight-backed chair, when Nathanael said, after a pause:

"I am glad to see you at all times, Mercy; but just now I am particularly glad, for I need your

help. Did Mr. Smith tell you what conversation he and I have had together?"

"Yes," replied Mercy, "and Dorothy wished me to tell you how very sincerely we all rejoice. She has prayed for you constantly; you are very dear to her, brother. She is so quiet and reserved that until you came I hardly knew how much she thought of you. I wish that she were here to help you. She is so much wiser and better than I am. But if you think I can at all help you, I will gladly try."

Mercy had the impression that Nathanael intended to lay before her some spiritual difficulties and doubts, but she need not have disquieted herself. It was a very clear and decided voice that spoke.

"You are both true friends, Mercy. I thought to find some little tie of kinship, but I hardly hoped for the hearty welcome, and the deep interest in me and mine which I have met with. It is this, as well as more direct teaching, that has at last brought me to understand the religion that you profess."

"Then you do understand, you do accept it?" said Mercy eagerly.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "I understand that I have for years been sinning against a love greater than human mind can compass; and now I wish to begin as nearly right as one can who has been stumbling along in the darkness till his eyes can poorly

understand the light. In brief, Mercy, I wish to begin my new life with the Baptists, but—" he paused a moment and then spoke more rapidly, "I know this will be a blow to Sophy. She does not in her sweet innocence understand the doubts and questionings that may assail a man; and she will see no reason why I should question the teachings of the church in which she has always worshiped with loving, reverent faith. Will you help me to make it plain to her that I act only from an honest and earnest desire to do exactly as the Book teaches?"

Here he laid his hand on the Bible on a table at his elbow. It had not been moved since the evening prayers, which now came regularly every night just after supper and before Penelope went to bed.

"I will do all that I can," said Mercy. "Sophy will surely understand and rejoice."

"Yes, oh, yes!" replied Nathanael quickly. "I only meant that if she speaks to you, you will know my feelings, and how to answer her. I desire to be baptized when Mr. Smith returns, and I will tell her myself about the matter."

He had made up his mind to speak to Mercy, because he was convinced that this gentle girl would understand his wife's feelings better than a rough man like himself; but it jarred on him to think of any difference of opinion between himself and Sophy,

so he was glad to turn to other matters. He began questioning about the Commencement and the new College building. Then Sophy came down-stairs; and Reuben, roused up by the additional stir, shook himself, tried to look as though he was wide awake, and then succumbed and went off to bed.

Not long after his departure the tall clock in the hall struck nine, the hour when bedroom candles were lighted and good-nights were spoken in decorous farm households. Sophy very punctually noted the hour, and at the first stroke folded away the bit of ruffling that she was hemstitching.

"You need a good beauty sleep to bring back your roses after the fatigues of the journey," she said to Mercy, as she took the candle that Nathanael lighted for his sister, and led the way up the stairs. But, once shut into Mercy's room, the fatigues and beauty sleep were forgotten.

"Let me act as maid to you, and brush out your hair," she said placing the candle on the toilet table before the old-fashioned small swinging-glass, and gently pushing Mercy into an arm-chair. "And while I am busy, you must tell me, dear, just what this graceless cousin of mine has been about. I fear that his infatuation has made him rash and overbold. Confess, sweetheart, that you liked not his scheme to meet you in the stage."

"Then it was a preconcerted plan!" exclaimed Mercy. "Oh, how could he so deceive me? He assured me that it was pure accident that brought him to Attleborough, and that seeing me in the coach, he could not forbear sending his servant on with his horse, and taking a seat in the stage for the return journey."

"Nay, nay, child; I know naught of the matter, but what you tell me," answered Sophy quickly. "I merely hazarded a suspicion that a certain pair of eyes had attracted him. You must tell me all that I am to believe; for what sense did one ever get from a man in love? If I am not in total darkness, I am in what Elspeth Folinsbee calls the 'gloaming,' and that half light is often more deceptive than total darkness."

"Oh, Sophy, what can I say?" replied Mercy despairingly. "I fear that the whole matter is grievously wrong, else why is it that I have not known a peaceful hour since the first moment that it came to me that he cared for me?"

The face that met Sophy's gaze, as she raised her eyes to the glass bore an expression of harassed misery, so utterly unlike the shy gentleness which had been a characteristic of the quiet, almost childlike young girl, that Sophy was startled completely out of her bantering tone.

"Child, if Arthur Donnycourt is destroying your happiness, I will never forgive him," she exclaimed with a sudden energy that startled Mercy in her turn. "If you rue your decision, just confide in me, sweetheart, and we will send him packing about his business. Trust me, no one will ever learn of the matter from me."

"Sophy, what do you mean?" exclaimed Mercy, half bewildered and wholly shocked. "You can surely never think that I would play the jilt, and break his heart."

"Nonsense," retorted Sophy; "men's hearts, like their promises, are made to be broken, my dear; and, as neither are worth much, the damage is not great. I would break the hearts of a dozen rakish captains, rather than see such trouble in your sweet face."

She was thoroughly roused, and in that moment Mercy had a glimpse of the imperious little beauty who had received with bewitching scorn the homage of many a ruffling beau and gay macaroni before the grave Nathanael carried off the loyal and passionate little heart that beat true as steel under all the gay fripperies and mocking smiles of a lady of fashion.

"How can you say such things?" cried Mercy. "Dorothy always taught me that a woman should remember that the man who woos her offers her the highest honor that he can; and even if she must

refuse him, she should do it decorously and courteously. He is not rakish, and he said, it was just my—my—being unlike fashionable ladies, that made him wish to be better; that—oh, Sophy! it is such an awful responsibility in my hands. I would I knew how to do him good; to lead him aright."

She had broken off from her rather stammering explanation, and now sat with tearful eyes and glowing cheeks, and hands clasped on her knee, with an eager fervor that again swayed the impulsive little matron.

"She does really care for him," was her mental comment; but aloud she said, with rather a keen glance at the face reflected in the glass, while she resumed the hair brushing more tranquilly:

"Dorothy's precept would be right enough if every man was a Sir Charles Grandison, or even a Mr. Jonathan Pursell."

At the latter name the quick blood mounted to Mercy's cheek, but it was unmistakably the flush of annoyance.

"It is the concealment that troubles me. I thought not of breaking my promise," she said with something of her usual quiet reserve. "I sometimes wish now that I had told all to Dorothy at first. I hardly know why I did not. It was foolish timidity, I suppose you will say. This unexpected meeting in the stage

upset me, and of course there we could talk of nothing but the ordinary topics. I mean, however, to tell Captain Donnycourt, that I will no longer hold him to this secrecy. I shall feel happy and contented as soon as that can be settled. Now, dear, you will wish me happiness, will you not?" she added tremulously putting up her hand to capture one of Sophy's that was hovering with loving pats and caressing touch about the shining locks of soft brown hair.

"I will do that with all my heart," replied Sophy, putting both arms about Mercy's neck; "and indeed you could not help doing Arthur Donnycourt good. I did not mean to speak ill of him, he is not at all like many of the young men who have no hearts, and whose heads are only powdered wigs, filled with a knowledge of piquet and a stock of silly compliments, for which they expect young ladies to simper their thanks. Now I will only finish plaiting this braid, and then you must positively have a good rest."

As she said, "Good-night," and left the room, Sophy had a pretty clear opinion that Donnycourt was the real instigator of all the concealment that troubled Mercy, and that her own maladroit blame of him had stung Mercy into taking all the responsibility on herself. It did not improve her opinion of Donnycourt, but she knew well that he would enjoy the spice of adventure, and also seriously desire not to take his

place as formally betrothed, until he had some definite plan for his marriage. She did not exactly see what she should do next; but she firmly resolved that Mercy should have from her plenty of kind and wise advice.

Nathanael was waiting for her with what patience he could, for this question of his baptism was too near to his heart, for him to delay telling her of his decision. Sophy listened and made no decided objection. She had dreaded this; but now that it had come her main fear was lest it should raise any barrier between herself and her husband, in whom all her happiness centered. He was more kind and gentle than ever, but she felt that for the first time in their married life, an influence stronger than her own had gained a permanent control over him, and it was with a troubled heart and anxious brain that she looked forward to the consequences of the step he was about to take.

CHAPTER XIII.

NATHANAEL RODMAN'S BAPTISM.

IT was near the middle of September when the "great man of Haverhill," as he was frequently called, arrived in Acton on his way home from Rhode Island. The fact that it was a ten-mile ride to Acton did not for a moment deter Nathanael when he learned that Mr. Smith would preach in Acton on the Lord's Day, and that the ordinance of baptism was to be administered between the morning and afternoon services. The arrangement was easily made that Nathanael should take Sophy on Black Bess, and that Reuben should take Mercy mounted behind him on Old Gray. Little Penelope had pleaded to be allowed to go, and Reuben was eager to suggest that she should ride behind him instead of his Aunt Mercy, but it was not expected that children should be ready with their suggestions; so Penelope only confided her regrets to Reuben when her mother decided that she should spend the day with the Folinsbees.

"If Elspeth were at home, I should not mind so much," remarked the little girl dolefully, "but she

is going to church, and there will be only old Goody Folinsbee. It is very, very dull."

"Never mind, Pen," said Reuben, "when I get old enough to have a horse of my own like Captain Donnycourt I will take you always behind me."

He had seen Douglas Folinsbee's mother, an old woman with a face wrinkled like a winter apple, and always framed in a big white frilled cap. She had lived on the borderland between England and Scotland. Many a queer tale she could tell, if she chose, both of Scottish superstition and of English madcap adventures; but she did not like children, and her toothless mouth and strong accent made it difficult to understand her; so Reuben heartily sympathized with the little maid who was to be condemned to spend the long bright September day in such companionship.

These plans, however, met with an unexpected jar. It was Saturday evening, all the day's work was finished, and upon the quiet household had settled that hush with which the New Englander began on the Saturday night his day of rest, when Mercy standing at the kitchen window saw Douglas Folinsbee's oldest child coming up the lane. She went out to meet the child, expecting a message concerning the arrangement for the next day, but Grizzie held in her hand a packet and said with a courtesy:

"Father's just got home frae Boston the night, and he said this was for Mistress Rodman, and I was to gie it to her ainsel'."

"Oh, it is the bit of lutestring for the new sleeve to my gown," said Sophy's voice behind them. "Come to the kitchen, Grizzie, I have a sweet cake for you."

She took the small parcel, but Mercy had already caught sight of a letter tied to it, and she grew tremulous as she recognized the handwriting of Arthur Donnycourt. She followed into the kitchen and stood by the window feeling strangely excited and nervous, while Sophy thanked the child and sent her off with a round seed cake.

After much deliberation, Mercy had written to Arthur, telling him that she was troubled and anxious, and thought it better that their engagement should be openly announced to her family. This was, no doubt, the answer to her letter, and in the short delay before the child was sent off, many conjectures had flitted through her mind. Had he taken her at her word, and sent a letter to her brother, formally asking his consent? or did Sophy's letter enclose a billet to herself?

"Come up-stairs to your room," said Sophy, who was also eager and nervous, "I will bring a candle."

The door was closed, the light obtained, and the parcel of lutestring tossed carelessly aside, while the

two eager women bent over the sealed packet. As Sophy opened it a smaller folded sheet directed to Mercy fell out. She caught it up hurriedly and for a moment or two each read in silence.

"Oh, what ought I to do?" exclaimed Mercy. "What has he told you? He writes that he will see me to-morrow, as he intends to be at Acton to attend the preaching of Mr. Smith, of whom he has often heard us speak. I am glad he should be there. But, oh, Sophy, I dread meeting him again in this way! What does he say to you?"

"Nothing of any importance; read it," said Sophy holding out the sheet. In truth it only contained a request that she would give the enclosed to Mercy, and would not forget her promise to help and advise them. Also there was a hint that between sermons they might have speech together and arrange matters.

Evidently the young man knew nothing of the special interest the services of the following day had for them. He had heard that Mr. Smith was to preach, and surmised that they would arrange to go. Sophy was vexed, but Mercy was more than vexed. She was strangely upset by these sudden and brief tidings, and her trembling hands and rapidly flushing and paling cheeks seriously alarmed Sophy.

"Do not distress yourself, dear," she said soothingly. "It will be all right at last."

"No, no," exclaimed Mercy; "it is not right to make a clandestine tryst, and on such a solemn occasion. Oh, Sophy, I cannot go."

"What shall I say to Nathanael?" said Sophy, with no little perplexity.

"True, I had forgotten. He knows well that no slight whim would keep me at home to-morrow. I must bear this a little longer," replied Mercy, but even as she spoke, she grew so white and her eyes looked so weary with dark circles around them, that Sophy sprang up to get her never-failing sal volatile.

"It is nothing," exclaimed Mercy almost peevishly; then she checked herself and tried to smile with her usual gentleness, as she put away her letter and said, "Now, let us go right down-stairs; they will wonder why we have closeted ourselves up here."

She took Sophy's arm and the two went down-stairs to join Nathanael and Reuben and little Pen; but Mercy had overtaxed herself. As she reached the lower landing she staggered and would have fallen if Sophy had not supported her. Sophy called loudly for help, and Nathanael sprang up the short flight to her assistance.

"What is the matter? Did you twist your ankle?" he asked, as he almost carried Mercy down the remaining steps.

"Oh, no, it was only giddiness! I never was so

foolish before," said Mercy trying to look as usual. But, although the faintness had passed off, her head was swimming and she looked sadly worn and pale.

Sophy made a fuss over her; Penelope was sent for a smelling-bottle, and Reuben for water; and Nathanael looked grave and anxious.

Mercy persisted in saying that she was quite well, only tired, but she was really so much shaken, that she was thankful to find herself carefully escorted upstairs again and put to bed by Sophy. There she was at least free to cry if she could not sleep after Sophy left her.

But it was not long before the door opened gently and Sophy returned.

"The question is settled," she said; "Nathanael will not hear a word about your accompanying us to-morrow. He suggests that I should stay at home with you."

"Oh, no, no!" said poor Mercy. "That would really worry me into a fever. There is no reason at all why you should stay."

"We shall see. If you are able to go to the Folinsbees, it can be easily arranged," replied Sophy. "I could not consent to leave you all alone in the house. But I only came to tell you what Nathanael says, so that you may not worry your poor little head any more about going. Now try to sleep." And she

kissed Mercy's tear-stained cheek and quickly left the room.

The morning found Mercy somewhat rested, but still pale and heavy-eyed, and thus it happened that little Penelope was mounted behind Reuben on Old Gray and Mercy was left instead to make the best of the companionship of old Goody Folinsbee.

"I feared it might be the beginning of an illness," said Nathanael to his wife as they rode along; "I am relieved that she does not seem worse this morning. Mercy is very like my mother, and I remember she sometimes had attacks of faintness and vertigo. I heard the doctor say once that it was not surprising after all she had gone through. The shock of my father's death was very great. I suppose with Mercy there is constitutional delicacy, and we must take good care that she is not overfatigued."

Sophy's cheeks burned, and she heartily wished that she could tell all to her husband and ask his advice; but the Beatouns never broke their word, and she had given her promise to Donnycourt. She consoled herself by thinking that she would give Arthur a very serious lecture.

Nathanael's thoughts were too much occupied with the important step he was about to take to allow him to spend much time in conjecture about Mercy's health; and his wife's silence did not strike him as it

might have done under other circumstances. She was turning over in her mind how she should get to speak with Donnycourt, and what she should say to him.

All her anxious forethought was, however, useless; for through all the long day not a glimpse of the gay captain greeted her eyes. The morning's discourse, from the words, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage," fell upon unheeding ears as far as Sophy was concerned, though to Nathanael it seemed that the text had been chosen for him alone, so exactly did it express his feelings and desires.

The solemn baptismal service recalled her wandering thoughts. As they stood by the river side, the placid water gleaming in the sunlight, the foliage on the banks already showing traces of the approach of autumn, while only the twitter of the birds, the rustle of the leaves, and the faint lap of the ripple at her feet was audible in the hush that had fallen on the gathered throng, a strange feeling of awe stole over her. When the silence was broken by the powerful and thrilling voice of the minister as he engaged in prayer; and afterwards as, one after another, the candidates were led down into the water and buried with Christ in baptism, this feeling of awe increased.

The contrast between this solemn scene and the

baptisms that she had witnessed before—when too often the persistent wailing of the infant member just received into the church awakened anything but awe-inspiring echoes in the consecrated building—deeply affected Sophy's impulsive nature. At that moment she almost wished that she had asked to be baptized with her husband. It did not as yet strike her that anything more was necessary than that she should make the request. Of the total change in heart and life that had begun in her husband, she had but very dim perception; and she certainly would have been utterly amazed if any one had told her that her present emotions were merely superficial sentiment with no real depth of religious feeling and thought.

Her anxiety about Donnycourt had subsided. She felt a relieved satisfaction that he was not there, and indeed had nearly forgotten about him, but as they were sitting under the trees eating their lunch while waiting for the afternoon service to begin, Reuben remarked:

"Captain Donnycourt has not stayed for the second meeting."

"Was he here?" asked Sophy quickly.

"Yes," replied Nathanael, "I caught sight of him just as the sermon was beginning, but I missed him afterwards. Doubtless, he had come a good distance, and could not remain for the whole day."

The subject dropped, but Nathanael could not repress an inclination to query what freak had brought the young man there; since even the heartiest desire to be just and kind could not lead him to the conviction that Arthur Donnycourt cared simply for the services of the day.

The afternoon sermon was from John xii. 46. "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness," and it formed a fitting close to this eventful day. On two at least it had made an impression that would never be effaced. To Nathanael and little Penelope it had been a day full of interest and peaceful happiness.

The child was tired and slept through part of the afternoon service; but Sophy was not shocked, she only made a resting place on her knee for the little girl's head. And Penelope, when she roused up for her long ride home in the evening, was turning over in her wise little brain, more of the preacher's words than her mother could have recalled.

She was a little timid as the darkness settled down, with only the starlight to guide them, and once or twice she clutched more tightly to Reuben's belt.

"Never fear, Pen; I noted the road well as we came; for I knew we should not be back before nightfall," he said cheerily.

"Reuben," she said in grave and almost awed tones,

"do you think any one could help loving Jesus? Think how terrible it must be to live always in darkness, away from him!"

"Do you love him, Penelope?" asked Reuben prompted partly by curiosity to hear her reply; for Pen was her father's daughter, and often answered with a degree of thoughtful consideration that sounded oddly from such childish lips.

"Yes," she replied, "I always loved the flowers and trees and the light and all the beautiful country; and how could I help loving Jesus when I was big enough to know that he made them?"

"But he made the darkness too," put in Reuben, trying to puzzle her childish philosophy.

"That is why there are stars in it," said Penelope, looking up at the deep blue vault studded with its shining points of light.

"But sometimes there are no stars," urged Reuben; "why is that?"

"I don't know," replied Penelope after a moment of thought; "unless it is because we do not love him enough to deserve more light."

"Oh, well, it is all figurative about light and darkness," said Reuben cutting the matter short. "See, Black Bess is getting ahead, and I believe Old Gray smells his supper."

Penelope's words had a habit of sticking in his

mind, just because she was so little, and could have no object or direct intention in uttering them. She said what she thought, not what she wanted him to think. Just now he preferred to change the subject.

Soon they were cantering up the home lane to the mounting-block, where they were greeted with a bright light and a comfortable smell of fried bacon issuing from the kitchen door. The door was wide open and they could see Mercy preparing a hot supper, while Elspeth Folinsbee, stepping briskly over the sanded floor, was setting pewter plates that shone like silver in the candle-light, on the table that gleamed white as a bleached cloth with constant scrubbing.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TALK BETWEEN MERCY AND SOPHY.

THE next day, when the work was done and the big kitchen tidy and clean as a new pin, while Penelope and Reuben were out in the woods and Nathanael busy at the farm work, Sophy and Mercy had settled themselves beside the broad low window seat in the afternoon sunlight. Though very skillful with her needle, Sophy had not yet learned the mysteries of spinning and weaving. Yet these were diligently practiced by the high-spirited daughters of liberty in those days when, to escape the odious taxation laid by Old England, in many a New England household the fleece from the sheep's back was carded, spun, woven, cut out, and stitched at home.

To Mercy this was every-day work, and since Nathanael's arrival she had busily turned off hank after hank of woolen yarn for winter socks. Now she had pulled out the big wheel, and, while Sophy sat down to mend Penelope's frock, she stood before it drawing out with dexterous turn and twist the even thread, for which she was noted even among the

skilled housewives and maidens of Providence Plantations.

"It was a rarely good sermon, that which Elder Smith preached yester morn," she said at last as she stopped to take off a fresh hank.

"Did Nathanael tell you of it?" said Sophy. "In truth, I was too occupied and bestead in my mind to heed it as I suppose I ought."

"Aye, Nathanael told me it was good, but I had a better rendering of it than he has yet given me, hours before I set eyes on any of you," replied Mercy with a demure smile lurking about the corners of her mouth. Sophy had noted that she looked brighter and more like herself than she had done since her arrival, and therefore she had put off making any reference to Donnycourt until Mercy should ask. Now, however, a sudden suspicion flashed into her mind.

"Child," she asked quickly, "who told you of the sermon? Nay, turn hither and look me in the face. You have had speech with Arthur Donnycourt."

"He told me, that a few more such sermons would make the colonies too hot for the King's troops. He says, there is already so much talk about liberty we have no need of sermons on that subject to stir up men's minds," said Mercy, turning again to her wheel. She was evidently speaking rather to relieve

her embarrassment, than with any very definite idea of what she was saying; but Sophy answered indignantly:

"I cannot pretend to carry a two hours' sermon in my head, but I will answer for it Mr. Smith was not preaching politics. He had as little call to say that as to come pestering you. Is that the way he keeps his promises to me? Nay, then I shall hold myself freed from mine own."

"Have I angered you, Sophy?" said Mercy, dropping the yarn with sudden anxiety. "He meant no harm. He said he merely stopped to rest his horse at Douglas Folinsbee's thinking that he might there pick up a chance word concerning my well being, since he had promised you not to come to the house while I was there. But Goody is deaf, and I was the only one who heard the sound of hoofs, and I went to the door."

"Well?" put in Sophy, who began to perceive that matters had taken a completely new face since she had talked with Mercy on Saturday night; "what had my gallant cousin to say for himself, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"You are vexed; I hear it in your voice," said Mercy coming to the chair and putting her arm about Sophy's neck, with a pretty pleading anxiety that went far to soothe the little matron's feeling of irri-

tation at the boldness with which the quick-witted Donnycourt had attained his object, in spite of her.

"And if I am, is it not on your account, Mercy?" she asked. "What care I for the comings and goings of Arthur Donnycourt, except as he may bring joy or sorrow to you?"

"Yes, and it is my fault that you care nothing about him," exclaimed Mercy. "I have poisoned your mind with my foolish grumblings. If you could only have heard how he spoke of you and of your kindness to him, you would not judge him harshly."

"He evidently pleaded his cause well with you," remarked Sophy. "I'll warrant, you did not even scold him; though his brief billet cost you a night's rest and kept you from the preaching yesterday."

"There is good in all things if we can but see aright," replied Mercy; "he said himself that if I had been there, he would doubtless have paid little heed even to Elder Smith's eloquent words; but now, I trust that the earnest appeal to those who are yet in the bondage of sin has touched his heart more deeply perhaps than he is as yet aware of himself."

The glow on Mercy's cheeks and the bright light in her eyes came from something deeper or higher than Sophy could understand; though it caused her an uneasy feeling of wonder if Arthur Donnycourt had any real knowledge of the nature of this young

girl, or even dreamed of the importance she would attach to his words.

"Does he mean to write openly to Nathanael or Dorothy?" she asked.

"He said he had received news from England concerning which he desired your counsel; and that if you did not say him, Nay, he would ride out here again as soon as his duties would permit him to absent himself from Boston," replied Mercy.

"Then why did he ride off without even a word to me?" asked Sophy, still suspicious, and unwilling to be too completely mollified.

"I fancy that he expected that you would come home shortly after the meeting. He seemed surprised and disconcerted when I told him that I did not expect you before nightfall, as you were to remain for the afternoon meeting," said Mercy watching Sophy's face anxiously, and endeavoring, as far as she truthfully could, to put her lover's conduct in the best light.

This was not hard to do, for simple-hearted Mercy was much given to reading other people's motives by her own, and Arthur Donnycourt had far too much worldly wisdom to let her perceive that an afternoon spent with his betrothed in Elspeth Folinsbee's clean quiet kitchen where a deaf old crone nodding in her chintz-covered arm-chair was their

only audience, was to him an unexpectedly wonderful piece of good luck. When she told him how it happened that Penelope took her place behind Reuben, he had heedlessly remarked that nothing could have happened better. But her pained and puzzled expression warned him to beware of careless levity and compliment, and hurried him into that explanation of his meaning which she had already repeated to Sophy. To please her he had also related much of the substance of the morning's sermon, and repeated it well too; for Donnycourt, with all his thoughtlessness, was a man of parts, and his quick intelligence enabled him readily to appreciate and to retain in mind any address displaying thought and eloquence.

Nor was Mercy entirely deceived in her impression that his heart was touched. His admiration for her religion was sincere as far as it went. Sitting in the quiet kitchen, with the September sun streaming through the small panes of the broad low window and touching Mercy's simple blue stuff gown, the shining braids of brown hair, and the earnest face, so pretty in its childlike thoughtfulness and play of light and shade, her simple faith seemed to belong to her as naturally as her quiet dress and peach-bloom complexion. All was a very pleasing change from the paint, the powder, the patches, the oftentimes forced

smiles and cutting civilities that ruffled it in brocade, feathers, and jewels in the society where he was accustomed to dance away his spare moments.

Sophy could understand all this, and when she was vexed with her cousin, she would question seriously whether this simplicity and earnestness would not pall upon him, when he had to conform himself to it in his wife. When, on the contrary, he re-instated himself in her good graces, she would then change her mind and sedately surmise that it would be the making of him, that his good qualities would be all brought out by his love for Mercy.

Just now the information that he desired her counsel had greatly softened Sophy's vexation.

"Did he give you any information concerning this news from England?" she asked after a pause, during which Mercy's wheel resumed its whirring and her own needle went industriously in and out.

"No, he merely said that it concerned his father; and that you, who were the old gentleman's favorite, could best tell him how he should reply to the letter that he had received," said Mercy.

"That is true," remarked Sophy. "Arthur always had an unfortunate faculty for irritating his father. He meant no harm, I dare say, but you know how men are. They can't understand humoring each other. That will be your province, Mercy; and, I

doubt not that in a short time you will be as great a favorite with Uncle Donnycourt as I used to be."

It was the first time that reference had been made to Mercy's future home, and she was startled. She had not thought that her marriage might place the ocean between herself and her own family.

"Do you mean that Arthur would wish to take me to England?" she asked, with unsteady voice.

"I suppose so. Why, would you not like to go?" asked Sophy carelessly, but mentally noting that Mercy for the first time in conversation with her had called Donnycourt by his Christian name.

"I would go with him wherever his duty called him," replied Mercy with the quiet dignity she showed at times when it was a simple question of right or wrong that she had to decide. "But he has told me that his elder brother will inherit the estates in England; and I hoped that he would remain here, at least for many years."

"I fancy that you are the only one who would utter that wish concerning one of Gen. Gage's officers," said Sophy, with a light laugh; "they are not so well liked by the colonists at large."

"Oh, I wish he could leave the army and settle down to quiet steady life!" said Mercy.

"What would you have him do?" asked Sophy.

"I have not thought definitely," replied Mercy, the

quick color flushing again in her cheeks. "But there are trades open, and we have friends who would help him to start in some business. I'm sure he would succeed in anything he undertakes, if he has time."

"Mercy, you are an angel of simplicity and goodness," exclaimed Sophy, with all her natural impetuosity. "I wish I were half as good as you."

That this young girl should be so ready to give up all thoughts of living at Donnycourt Hall, and that she should be entirely undazzled by the romance that usually attaches to the scarlet coat was a new revelation to Sophy. She felt more than ever the difference between the ways of thinking of her new relations and those of the relations whom she had left behind in England. Her impetuosity embarrassed Mercy, who flushed warmly as she answered:

"You must not say that, Sophy. I know that you do not mean to mock me; but it sounds like it."

"To mock you, sweetheart!" exclaimed Sophy. "Indeed nothing could be farther from my thoughts. I only wondered at your indifference to position and wealth. You see, I cannot be so unworldly. I used to think that Nathanael ought to have been master of Rodmanhurst. And even now when I fancied that I had settled down quietly and contentedly to this farm life, I find that I don't like the notion that he should cast in his fortunes with those who are looked down

upon and even persecuted, as you know the Baptists are in Massachusetts. In Rhode Island and Providence it is, of course, different," she added quickly.

"I do not think the Baptists are much liked anywhere," replied Mercy quietly. "It was only by the greatest care and attention that Rhode Island—which was started, you know, by Baptists—obtained a charter placing the principal control of it in their hands. And in many ways we are made to feel that there is little sympathy with us even where there are no actual oppressions. But the Bible tells us to rejoice and be glad when men revile us and speak despitefully of us."

"And do you feel that way?" asked Sophy. "Oh, Mercy, I wish that I were good enough to understand all that Nathanael feels and thinks. I cannot bear that we should have separate interests."

"They cannot be really separate when you both love and serve the same Master," replied Mercy; "and I cannot help thinking, Sophy, that you too will learn to understand our Lord's commands as Nathanael does; and to follow as he has followed them."

Sophy did not reply. An involuntary impulse had led her to speak so freely, and she was not sorry that the entrance of Reuben and Penelope put a stop to further conversation.

CHAPTER XV.

ARTHUR DONNYCOURT RE-APPEARS.

THE sharp winds of October were bringing down the nuts and the many-hued leaves from the trees, and rustling among the fodder, drying in the corn-shocks. Reuben had already started on his homeward journey, bearing with him a hearty invitation to repeat his visit and many kind messages from Mercy to his mother.

Penelope's longing gaze followed him as he cantered away with his uncle, who intended to accompany him to Boston and then to return with Old Gray. When they were quite out of sight the little girl returned with rather a doleful face to the little stool beside the fireplace and the long seam on which her daily stint was marked by a pin.

"Poor little damsel, she is dull without her playfellow," whispered Mercy to Sophy, as she noticed the long-drawn sighs, and the many stops to measure with the little middle finger how much space still remained to be stitched before reaching the inexorable pin. "Let her run out and gather nuts for awhile. The seam can wait till afternoon."

"I don't like her to run about alone, when her father is not there to have an eye to her," answered Sophy doubtfully.

"But stay; Elspeth Folinsbee promised to lend me her fluted candle-moulds, and as I want to make bayberry candles this week, you might walk down there with Penelope to get them. This wind will give you both rosy cheeks and blow away the megrims. I promised to send some ointment for Goody's rheumatism, and you might take that with you. Come, child," she called to Penelope; "fold up your seam, and get ready to go out with your aunt."

Penelope, nothing loath, folded away her work and the two soon appeared well wrapped in cloaks and hoods for their walk.

"If Elspeth can come to-morrow to help us, I would get the candle making well over before Nathanael comes back," said Sophy.

"I will ask her," replied Mercy, and they went out, leaving Sophy to her regular morning occupations.

Her thoughts meanwhile were even busier than her hands. She was wondering whether Nathanael would meet Arthur Donnycourt, and turning over again surmises as to the nature of the news from England, about which he intended to consult her. They had neither heard or seen anything of him since the

memorable fifteenth of September, and she was growing impatient and vexed. A loud rap at the door roused her from her meditations, and, opening it hastily, the young captain himself stood before her.

"What means that expression? Is it pleasure or dismay that has bereft you of speech, cousin mine?" he asked with an amused smile, as Sophy looked at him for a moment in silent surprise.

"Both or neither, as it best pleases you to imagine," she retorted, recovering herself. "But come inside, and answer for yourself. What does your conscience tell you that you merit?"

"My conscience!" he exclaimed, as he stepped inside and closed the door. "Nay, if you attack me thus, even upon the door-step, I must cry you Mercy."

"Arthur, for shame! I will have no giddy jesting on that subject," cried Sophy indignantly.

"Forgive me; you are right," he said, with that sudden change from jest to serious earnestness which often went far to atone for his most reckless speeches, by leaving the impression that they were but a veneer to hide deeper feeling underneath.

"Where have you fastened your horse?" asked Sophy, mindful of her combined duties as host and hostess in the absence of Nathanael.

"He had cast a shoe, so I left him at the smithy and walked across lots," replied Arthur.

"Then you did not meet Nathanael and Reuben?" said Sophy. "They left this morning for Boston. Reuben is on his way home and Nathanael has gone that far with him."

"And Mercy, surely she has not gone?" exclaimed Arthur in sudden consternation.

"Oh, no, she must stay with us for some time yet," replied Sophy; "she has only gone out for a walk with Penelope."

Arthur pondered for a few seconds and spread his hands to the blaze that leaped and crackled among the logs on the shining andirons.

"I am sorry that I did not know Mr. Rodman would be absent to-day," he said at last; "but since I am so unfortunate as to miss him, you will not refuse to give me your advice, Sophy. I have come, as of old, to pour out to your sympathizing ear all my woes. In truth, this is the most provoking and disconcerting chain of circumstances that ever entangled an unlucky man."

"And, as usual, all of your own entangling," replied Sophy coolly.

"No, no, don't condemn me unheard," cried Arthur. "I am not to blame for my brother's misdeeds."

Sophy's look of studied indifference changed immediately.

"What is the matter?" she asked anxiously. "Has William been getting into trouble again?"

"Yes, worse than before," replied Arthur gloomily. "More gambling debts; and what with racing and gambling, it seems to be a question whether he will kill himself or our father first. The poor old gentleman writes in dreadfully low spirits and—well, to tell the whole matter briefly he wants me to come home and be the good boy of the family."

"To give up your commission?" asked Sophy.

"I suppose so. But I will not do that; and—you have not heard all yet—he wants me to settle down and marry," said Arthur with a short and very unmirthful laugh.

"That is what you yourself want to do; so that is no very hard command," put in Sophy. "But what are you and your wife to live upon?"

"He promises me a good allowance; and then you must understand I am to marry an heiress," said Arthur.

"Oh!"

Sophy's tone expressed dismay; but she could not affect surprise. She expected this from her knowledge of the Donnycourt family.

"Now, isn't it a miserable state of affairs?" said Arthur. "The governor has nobody but himself to thank if William turns out a scamp; and to ask me

to make good all his misdeeds is rather too much. Still it will not do to say that out bluntly. What shall I do, Sophy? I have been hoping that you could help me to find a way out of the scrape. You surely will not fail me."

"Is this what you wanted my advice on three weeks ago?" asked Sophy, thus taking refuge from the relenting mood which usually overpowered her indignation when he dropped all airs and came to her so like the bright, mischievous boy of former days.

"I knew then of William's scrapes. But this new idea of making me patch up the family fortunes has come in a letter which I received only a few days ago," replied Arthur.

As he spoke he drew out a letter and handed it to her.

Sophy read in silence; it was a sad and touching appeal, but selfish throughout. Sophy, who knew the effect on her husband of being made to wait in idleness for the chance of an inheritance which did not come to him, at last shook her head in grave disapprobation. After some minutes of silence, she said:

"He wants you so much; I don't think you can refuse to go, Arthur."

"And marry that terrible hatchet-faced Miss Molyneux? I know whom he means, though he

names no name. No, thank you," exclaimed Arthur starting to his feet and giving to a log that had fallen forward a kick which sent a shower of sparks up the wide black throat of the chimney.

"Of course, I did not mean that," replied Sophy, her color rising and her eyes sparkling dangerously. "If you even thought of such a thing, you would do well to keep away from me. But there," she added hastily, as he turned towards her with an impassioned gesture, "keep the protestations for Mercy's ear; of course, you don't think of it; and now listen to my plan.

"Put an end to all this secrecy and hasten your marriage. If you employ all your eloquence, I see no reason why you should not be able to return to England with your bride. That would settle the marriage question; and for the rest you must use your own tact and good sense. And don't forget *to take your wife's advice* on difficult points."

She said the last words with a roguish twinkle in her eyes. All her anger had vanished. Her own advice sounded so well, that she was again her usual complacent and merry self. But Arthur sat moody and irresolute.

"A fine hornet's nest you would have me plunge Mercy into!" he remarked. "And how much do you suppose I should receive of the allowance that

my father promises me? I can answer for it that not a farthing would come to me."

"What then?" exclaimed Sophy. "You are not penniless; and you are not going to marry an extravagant young lady."

"I have only what comes from my mother's fortune," replied Arthur; "and there is the whole entailed property going to William. It is mere justice that my father should make me a reasonable allowance. I know well enough that Mercy would sacrifice her comfort willingly if she imagined I wished it. But do you think I am the man to ask it of her?"

He spoke with such real feeling, and the glow of love and pride made his handsome face so attractive, that Sophy began to think he must be right, and that she had not taken sufficient thought before giving her advice.

"I suppose I shall have to go to England and speak for myself," he said, relapsing into his discontented tone. "I suppose, as you say, I ought to go. It is a miserable bore; but I don't see any other way."

"Do you mean that you would go without having your engagement announced, and that you would not tell your father of it when you see him?" asked Sophy.

"It would do no good to make any talk just now. Yes, I think it would be wiser to leave things as they are until I can return with definite prospects to offer," replied Arthur. "Mr. Rodman and Mrs. Seaton would naturally expect that of me, and it will save many annoyances if nothing is said while matters of business are unsettled."

"It will do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Sophy sharply. "She is truthful as the day and hates concealment. If you go off thus you richly deserve to find your promised bride wedded to Mr. Jonathan Pursell when you return."

It was one of the ill-advised speeches into which Sophy's impulsive nature sometimes hurried her. A dark flush rose to Arthur's face, and the hand that rested on the high mantel-shelf clenched tightly. After a slight pause he said in a carefully controlled tone:

"We will not discuss that question. As to my father, I see you are right. I was undutiful enough to think only of the annoyance to myself; but the poor old man has had much to bear from William. I ought to try to smooth matters; and I can then announce my intended marriage in person, with proper filial respect. Thank you, Sophy, I knew you would set me straight. Now I think I will stroll down the lane. I might meet Mercy returning."

Sophy, who had expected an outburst, was puzzled and rather alarmed, as people often are when they meet something they cannot understand. Before she could collect her thoughts to answer Arthur had taken his hat and was bowing over her hand with his usual courtly grace. He looked grave, but not in the least offended; and as he went out Sophy was left with the uncomfortable reflection that she had made some blunder, and that he had tried to pass it over In the part of mentor that she had laid out for herself either of these thoughts was very vexatious.

After he was fairly gone she was angry with him; then having no one there to take his defence, she grew penitent and inclined to scold herself. She had begun to think less about money in this new country, where she had not the family at Rodmanhurst with the servants in livery, the grandly tiresome dinners, and all the stately routine always before her to compare with her own plain, quiet home; but she now began to think that perhaps Arthur was right, that he ought not to throw away the prospect of a comfortable allowance from his father, and that Mercy ought to understand this. So she settled down to her interrupted work with a determination to be very good and kind and wise to everybody that warmed up again a pleasant glow of self-satisfaction in her heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOODY FOLINSBEE HELPS TO TANGLE THE SKEIN.

WHATEVER Sophy might have had in mind to say to Arthur was unavoidably deferred, for Mercy and Penelope returned without him. At first Sophy thought he had not seen Mercy, as his name was not mentioned by either of them. But in the evening, when Penelope had gone to bed and they were sitting quietly knitting by the light of the blazing fire, Mercy spoke of a short talk she had with him while Penelope and Grizzie Folinsbee were out gathering nuts. No one but Elspeth and Goody knew that he had been at the farm-house. This much Sophy learned, but Mercy seemed to have little else to tell. She said he had left his farewell to Sophy, as he was obliged to return to his post as soon as possible, but he would ride out again when he had more time at his disposal. Mercy did not appear annoyed or disturbed. On the contrary she was in the mood of quiet contentment that had followed upon her lover's former visit, and Sophy deemed it best to press no inquiries at present.

Elspeth came to assist on the following day. The

work of making the tallow-dips, by repeatedly dipping the wick in the hot melted tallow and allowing it to harden between each dipping until it attained the proper size; and the more elaborate process of making the green bayberry candles, that were run in fluted moulds and intended for special use,—kept them all busy until nearly the time when Nathanael was expected.

The winter's supply of artificial light was hanging up for a final hardening before being packed away in the store-room, and Elspeth had gone home when Sophy looking from the kitchen window exclaimed:

"Here is Nathanael. But who is he bringing with him?"

Mercy came to peep over her shoulder at the rather heavily built figure dismounting from Old Gray.

"It is Jonathan Pursell," she said quickly; "I trust he brings no ill news from home."

She went forward to the door to greet him with an eagerness that called up a sudden light into the young man's face. It faded as she addressed him with anxious inquiries about her sister, but not before Sophy had noticed it. He had come to Boston on business connected with the College, and having met Nathanael had received a pressing invitation to come home with him.

"It was Mr. President's desire that I should learn all that I could about the troubles of the Baptists, especially concerning this matter of certificates," he said, as he drew near to the bright, cheerful fire.

"I told him he could not have come at a better moment," added Nathanael coming in from the stable and joining the group round the wide fireplace. "It is the very question that interests me deeply, now that we are on the point of forming a Baptist Church in Chelmsford. I would have paid taxes and rates without dispute so long as I belonged to no particular church, but if we mean to constitute our own church, we must be ready to support it; and I am not rich enough to pay towards the support of two churches. Therefore I say by all means let us take out the certificates, if certificates they must have."

"What are these certificates?" asked Sophy; "I have heard them talked about, but I have never rightly understood what they may be."

"Truly, Mrs. Rodman, that cannot be explained in two words," replied Jonathan. "It puzzles some of our wisest heads to find out exactly what they would have us certify, and in what manner."

"Come, come," exclaimed Nathanael hastily, "discussion and explanation on an empty stomach are but sorry fare. Let us first discuss the contents of yonder pot, Sophy," pointing to a big pot hanging

from the crane, which emitted a savory odor very grateful to the nostrils of hungry men, coming in from a long ride against a sharp wind.

The bustle of dishing up the steaming hot supper put a stop to further talk on the subject. But Sophy felt too anxious, to dismiss the matter easily from her thoughts. She had paid but little attention to the talk about troubles that had fallen on Baptist families, who refused to pay taxes to support the State Church, so long as it did not concern her personally. But now she recalled with uncomfortable distinctness the conversation between her husband and Donnycourt concerning the Ashfield Baptists, and incidents related by Mr. Smith at various times when the talk had turned on the question of freedom in religious matters.

When supper was over and the kitchen tidied up, she went up-stairs as usual to tuck in Penelope with a good-night kiss, a remnant of nursery habits that the little damsel of nine clung to as tenaciously as her mother did, notwithstanding occasional hints from other matrons that Penelope was "too big a girl for such baby ways."

When she came down again she caught Jonathan's words evidently in answer to some remark from Nathanael.

"The whole business is wrong from the foundation.

No government has a right to exact money from the members of one church to support the minister of a different church. It strikes at the very root of liberty in religious faith. Our forefathers came to this new country seeking freedom from oppression in matters of religion; and now, scarce a century and a half later, oppressions are meted out by their children with equal rigor, and with less excuse, than in the old country."

"Ah, there you go too far," said Nathanael. "In the old country, there was no loop-hole of escape for Dissenters; but here, by giving in the certificate which you despise, a man may prove that he belongs to a Baptist Church and thus be exempted from taxation to support any other church or minister. Of course, you of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations have taken the right and just course in giving absolute freedom; but you need a short residence in Old England to make you tolerant of the shortcomings of your neighboring colonies."

"But what do these certificates avail?" replied Jonathan. "The Assembly in November, 1757, made a law that Baptists, in order to be exempted from ministerial taxation must have their names entered on a list, signed by three members and the minister of the church to which they belong, and this list must be exhibited annually on or before July twentieth to the

assessors. How did that work in the case of Mr. John White, merchant of Haverhill?"

"I have heard Mr. Smith say, that he was hardly used; but I never inquired strictly into the particulars," replied Nathanael. He glanced uneasily towards the low chair in which Sophy had placed herself; but Jonathan only heeded his words, for his own eyes were fixed on Mercy who was listening with eager interest.

"I can tell you, as shortly as may be, the facts of the case," he said. "The Baptists, although they had given the prescribed certificates, were taxed the same as the rest, when it was voted to build a new meeting-house for the First Parish in Haverhill, and a quantity of Mr. White's goods were seized to pay the tax. This happened in 1766, five years ago last month. Mr. White sued the assessors in the County Court the following December, but on various pleas the matter was deferred till November, 1767, when at Salem after a fair hearing the jury gave the Baptists thirty pounds damages and costs. Complaint was at once made that the damages were too high. Mr. White wishing the matter settled agreed to remit twelve pounds and the court gave judgment that the rest should be paid. But the lawyers interfered and got it referred to another court, and at last in June two years ago, the case was turned against the Bap-

tists who were at length eighty pounds out of pocket by the whole affair."

"On what ground was the new verdict rendered?" asked Nathanael, forgetting in his strong love of justice and natural interest in the case, the probable effect it would have on Sophy.

"It turned on the fact that the Certificate Law did not distinctly state whether such certificates were to be given only for baptized members, or for regular worshipers at the Baptist Meeting. The words of the Certificate in this case stated 'they do frequently and usually attend public worship with us on the Lord's Days.' But the Court, though it owned the law meant to include steady worshipers, gave decision against them, because it was not clearly expressed; and they excused the overruling of the former decision and calling a new trial, by saying that it was a matter of great importance."

Nathanael sat silently gazing into the fire with contracted brow, and Jonathan continued:

"You have, doubtless, heard from Mr. Smith how they treated Widow Kimball, of Bradford, after she had given in a certificate and refused to pay a tax levied on her afterward. On a cold winter night, at nine or ten o'clock in the evening, she was taken by the collector and carried two miles on her way to jail. They stopped there for some hours at a tavern; there

she was advised by friends to pay the money. She did so and was then released to return in the middle of the night on foot through the snow and bitter cold to her three little children, whom she had left at home."

"Was it not while preaching at her house that Mr. Smith was once grievously insulted and tormented?" asked Mercy, who was listening with deep interest.

"Aye," replied Jonathan, "that was when her husband was yet alive. Amos Milliken, a sheriff, headed the mob of rioters, and all Solomon Kimball's endeavors to keep peace in his own house were of no avail. At last Mr. Smith began the service, unheeding them, and you can well imagine that his voice and dignity of manner could quell tumult. Some of the men who left lay in wait for him, and had he not been detained providentially, they would surely have done him an injury."

"I had not heard of this lying in wait, though I know his life has been endangered in other ways," said Nathanael. "I asked him about a stone that I saw one day in his room at Haverhill; and he told me it had been cast through his window when he lay in bed, one night. It was large and would certainly have killed him, had it struck his head. He told me he kept it as a remembrance of the mercy of God in preserving him. But surely," he added, after a slight

pause, "there will be appeals made and these grievances must be righted."

"Efforts are being put forth," said Jonathan. "Last month the Warren Association chose the Rev. John Davis of Delaware, who was ordained a year ago pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Boston, to act as their agent, and to endeavor, in concert with their agents in London, to obtain the establishment of religious liberty throughout the land. And the Rev. Isaac Backus has been requested to aid in the work."

"Meanwhile," said Nathanael, "we can but adhere as strictly as possible to such means as are open to us to avoid persecution and troubles."

Though Sophy had not uttered a word she had drunk in every syllable. At times she trembled at the thought of the trials that might be in store for Nathanael. But again all her brave and ardent spirit was roused to resent the injustice and cruelty of which she heard.

"I will join the Baptist Church too, and stand by my husband in everything," she thought with proud defiance.

She did not examine her own motives deeply enough to discover that in this resolve she was imperiously giving her support and sanction to a persecuted people, rather than herself striving to follow in the footsteps of her despised and rejected Saviour.

CHAPTER XVII.

JONATHAN PURSELL VISITS NATHANAEL.

JONATHAN PURSELL remained with the Rodmans only until the following day. He went on from there to Haverhill to visit Mr. Smith, and he was eager to return as soon as possible to his interrupted studies. His short visit, however, impressed Sophy with the great change that had been wrought in him since she first met him. His devotion to Mercy was evidently as strong as ever, but it no longer showed itself in an awkward, embarrassed manner, and no one but a quick observer like Sophy, or one who had known them intimately before could have guessed his feelings towards her.

Short, however, as his stay was and restrained as was his conduct, there was another pair of eyes whose owner fancied herself sharp enough to discover what had led him to Chelmsford. This was no other than old Goody Folinsbee. She had been mightily taken with the handsome young captain, and he was not slow to discover this. Her admiration for his laced coat and general air of distinction was the more pleasing, because in Boston his Majesty's officers met

often with unmistakable tokens of hostility, and in the country villages the sturdy colonists, even where they were still staunch in their respect for the mother country, showed more admiration for Liberty Trees than for the most ruffling macaroni that ever donned the red coat and drew a rapier.

To be gracious and condescending to his inferiors, when they recognized his condescension and their own inferiority, was as natural to Captain Donnycourt, as to be the devoted servant of a pretty woman. Therefore he found no difficulty in making Goody Folinsbee understand that he would prefer not to have his Sunday visit to Mistress Mercy talked about, and in gaining her over to further in any way his wishes.

Goody's eyes twinkled and she nodded till the wide frill of her cap flapped and quivered, and from that time she took a special interest in all that concerned Mercy. She would have been well pleased to be taken into confidence, and to have conveyed secret billets and made trysts; and she was rather puzzled and almost offended with Mercy's grave and quiet dignity. Any allusion to the gallant young gentleman fell flat, when Mercy either replied as simply as if it had been a remark on Goody's rheumatism, or else quietly held her peace.

To Goody, who had seen post-chaises with steaming horses come galloping past her cottage on the Scottish

border and had occasionally caught glimpses of the eager anxious faces of the brides-elect peeping from the carriage windows in terror lest the hasty and informal Scottish marriage ceremony should be interrupted before its close by the arrival of pursuing parent or guardian, this young maiden's demeanor seemed very tame and cold. It lacked entirely the spice of romance and adventure that Goody had scented when the young captain cajoled her to secrecy concerning his visit, and pressed a coin as a reminder into her withered palm.

Jonathan Pursell's visit to the Rodmans came like a gleam of light upon her perplexity. Mercy had come down on an errand about the candle-making of the preceding day, and while she was sitting in Elspeth's kitchen Jonathan entered. He had intended to walk to Haverhill, but Nathanael advised him to stop and ask if Douglas Folinsbee had a job of hauling in that direction and could give him a lift for a few miles.

Mercy did not expect to see him again, and perhaps looked a trifle embarrassed. However it might be, Goody watched them narrowly, caught imperfectly his promise to tell her sister of her welfare, and by the time Jonathan had said a final good-bye and mounted beside Douglas on the wagon, Goody had settled in his own mind that he was an interloper, of

whom the handsome captain would do well to beware. She would have liked nothing better than to convey to him a warning, but that was impossible. She could only crouch in her chimney-corner and watch such events as might take place within the four walls of the low-rafter kitchen that bounded her world.

Unconscious Jonathan meanwhile jogged onward to do himself what she would fain have done. After his visit to Haverhill Jonathan returned to Boston and there he went to look up Reuben, who expected to tarry for a time with friends in the town. He met the lad one day walking in the street with a young gentleman who was no other than Captain Donnycourt.

The captain had returned from Chelmsford in a very bad humor with the world in general. He had gone thither fully determined to make his suit formally known to Nathanael. The unexpected absence of the latter caused a hitch in that plan, which gave him time to reconsider his resolve. He was half glad of the delay, half vexed that the trouble of deciding had not been definitely taken out of his hands. Behind all this vexation lurked a feeling of annoyance at the turn matters had taken in England. A year ago he would willingly have started home to hunt up a pretty heiress, and to play the part of the family prop and stay. Now he had no intention of

giving up Mercy. But it was really annoying that this could not have happened sooner, or else not have happened at all.

While at Chelmsford, this feeling had been dispelled first by Sophy's allusion to Jonathan Pursell, which aroused in him jealous anger; and afterwards by the sweet and gentle influence which Mercy always exercised over him. Besides a very real attachment to her, he had a perception that she drew out the good in his character, and it was certainly agreeable to be attracted to the right by those clear gray eyes, that dimpling mouth, and the sweet tones of a voice that had not a false note in its honest ring.

After his return to Boston the old debates began again. Should he, according to Sophy's advice, be married at once, and take his wife home with him, or should he go to England and leave matters here as they were? He was strongly inclined to the latter course; and with a dim, hazy idea that Reuben might prove useful as a correspondent, through whom during his absence he could have intercourse with Mercy unknown to her sister, he set to work and hunted him up.

The sudden and unlooked-for appearance of Jonathan Pursell gave a new aspect to matters and his simple remark to Reuben that he had seen his uncle and aunts roused a host of suspicions in Arthur's

mind. Was this the meaning of Sophy's hint? Why had she not told him plainly that she was expecting Jonathan? He answered Pursell's greeting with but scant courtesy, and Reuben himself was far from cordial. He had no desire to avail himself of Jonathan's proposal that they should travel home together, for he was enjoying much his holiday and his intercourse with Donnycourt. He replied by requesting Jonathan to give his duty to his mother and to tell her that their friends pressed him so warmly to stay longer, that he could not well refuse.

Jonathan walked a short distance with them, then noting that his company was not desired, he made an excuse and left them. Donnycourt, however, even then, did not resume his gay chat.

"Is he sent to tie a leading-string to you, and fetch you home?" he asked with a disagreeable sneer.

"I don't think he would care to try that," replied Reuben, with a laugh that was meant to seem careless, while the hot boyish blood mounted to his forehead.

"Well, I must leave you here. I have some business to attend to at the barracks."

With this rather curt leave-taking, Arthur turned in the direction of the barracks, while Reuben pursued his walk, inwardly fuming at the notion that Pursell was sent to look after him, and also at the cool way in which Donnycourt had dropped him.

"I must settle it in some way," said Donnycourt to himself as he passed on his way. "I'm not going to be cut out of all the money and just play into William's hands. But there's no knowing what they will set on foot here, while I'm away. Even Sophy, I see, is not to be trusted. Come back and find Mercy married to that fellow! Much obliged for the warning, fair cousin. I'm not such a fool." Thus musing angrily, he strode on at a rapid pace. Suddenly a thought struck him. He stopped, considered for a few moments, and then muttered: "The very thing. Rogers will do anything for me; I'll explain to him that it is only a precaution. We'll have all done fair and square, with bells and favors when I return." His moody countenance cleared and he resumed his walk with eager alacrity.

A few days later Sam appeared at Chelmsford with a letter from his master. It was for Sophy, and contained simply the information that her cousin had made all arrangements to sail for England the first week in November, and that he begged leave to present himself for a farewell visit on the fourth of November. There was also an enclosure for Mercy.

Nathanael had gone out, and Mercy and Penelope were up-stairs, so that Sophy had time to read the letter through and consider what she should answer. In her vexation and annoyance, she was half inclined

to throw the whole package in the fire, to send no answer, and to say nothing about it to any one. She heartily wished that this negro, whom she had never before seen, had happened to meet her husband and to hand the missive to him. It did not occur to her that Arthur had given Sam careful instructions not to go near the house until he knew that Rodman was out.

She was roused from her perplexed meditations by Mercy's voice calling to her from the top of the stairs. She thrust the letter in the pocket that hung at her girdle, and went up-stairs with an unconcerned countenance.

"What is it?" the girl asked in low tones not to be overheard by Penelope in the bedroom, but with sharp anxiety evident in her pale cheeks and eager eyes. "What has happened to Arthur? Sophy, you are hiding something from me."

There was nothing to be done but to hand her the letter. Mercy read it through eagerly, drew a sigh of relief and then looked at Sophy, who stood half abashed and wholly angry, playing with her keys.

"It is a simple thing that he asks," said Mercy. "I can surely with all propriety say 'yes' to his request."

"You may call it a simple thing; I call it a very dishonorable proceeding. Why does he not write to

my husband or to your sister? I am tired of secret missions and underhand appointments. I am heartily ashamed of him. I did not think a cousin of mine would have acted so dishonorably."

She spoke hotly and without in the least calculating the effect of her words. But Mercy, the timid, shrinking maiden now stood straight and tall before her, her cheeks burning, her grey eyes big and dark with indignant resolution.

"You must not say that to me, Sophy," she said with proud self-control, that alarmed the excited little matron more than a tempest of anger, or a burst of passionate tears. "I am very sorry if I have influenced him for evil, by not being open at the first; but now, I shall not deny his request to see me again before he sails."

She went down-stairs to a secretary that stood in the front room and wrote a few lines.

Sophy followed her and stood watching her till she began to fold the sheet, then she took up the pen that Mercy had laid down, saying gently:

"Forgive me, sweetheart; I did not mean to anger you. Shall I write a line to bid him come?"

Mercy's anger was quickly turned away by a soft word, but she was still sore and hurt. Her lips began to tremble and she could only trust herself to answer:

"If you will."

That was enough. Sophy wrote a few lines, enclosed Mercy's billet, directed and sealed the letter, and gave it to Sam.

After this, the two avoided the mention of Arthur's name. Mercy could not dismiss from her mind an uncomfortable suspicion that Sophy had meant to act without her knowledge in this matter, and that it was owing to the accident that she had chanced to see and to recognize Sam coming up the lane, that she had received her lover's billet in time to reply to it; while Sophy finding she had set in motion forces more difficult to control than she had imagined, now heartily longed to be free of the whole entanglement.

This feeling of annoyance raised a slight barrier between Mercy and herself, and made her enter with even more interest than usual into the subject which now greatly occupied her husband's thoughts,—the organization of the new church. It was her nature to desire to feel in perfect accord with those she loved, and this often led her into trouble; because, instead of quietly avoiding a subject on which she found opinions jarred, she would eagerly attempt to bring about harmony and thus make matters worse. Now, as she was afraid to enter into any explanation with Mercy, she threw herself with all her impulsive ardor into the subject that interested Nathanael.

Her husband was both pleased and surprised, and

he began to think that he had done wrong in trying to keep from her all the disadvantages to which he might be subjected owing to his connection with the Baptists. Instead of tearful repining, or anxious attempts to dissuade him from what he felt to be the right course, she seemed to feel fewer forebodings than he had himself.

"What did they all come over here for?" she asked indignantly, as they sat before the glowing fire a few evenings after the arrival of Arthur's letter. "Wasn't it because they wanted to do as they pleased, and not to conform to the Church of England? Then what right have they to try to keep other people from doing as they please? I heard what Mr. Pursell was saying to you, and I have no patience with such meanness. I suppose that Douglas and Elspeth Folinsbee and the Purdys would like to set themselves up as knowing more than you, the grandson of Sir Peter Rodman, of Rodmanhurst."

Mercy opened her eyes in amazement and Nathanael smiled indulgently.

"My grandfather never taught me much on that matter," he replied.

"I don't care what Sir Peter taught you; you are a better judge than the Presbyterians, or Congregationalists, or whatever they choose to call their State Church," said Sophy with a willful nod that set the

ribbons fluttering in the dainty cap that covered her pile of dark curls.

"A better judge as to my own actions," put in Nathanael. "If other men think that they find different commands in the Scriptures, let them act as their consciences dictate. For myself, after reading carefully, my conscience bids me follow and try to teach the principles of the Baptists. I have neither the right, nor the desire to force others to agree with me. The Baptists do not claim freedom for themselves alone. There are those who would have us believe that they hold a monopoly of that article; but we are not of that sort."

"Of course not," cried Sophy; "you are just and honorable, but I know well that you are fit to teach those people who take such airs upon themselves. If you think the Baptists are right, that is enough for me, and I mean to join them myself."

She was a little frightened as she heard the sound of her own words; but they were spoken, and the Beatouns always held to their word, so she looked up bravely with no sign of flinching in the tightly closed lips and indignant eyes. Mercy was too much puzzled to speak, and even Nathanael was completely taken by surprise. The first flush of pleasure was followed by a painful feeling that his wife had very little idea of what she was talking about.

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure, dear Sophy," he said at last; "but in this matter I cannot be conscience even for my own wife. It is a subject for careful thought and earnest prayer."

He spoke very gently and tenderly, but Sophy felt sadly chilled. There was silence for a few moments; then she rose and began to roll up her knitting, preparatory to going up-stairs to give Penelope her good-night kiss.

Mercy watching her thought the fingers trembled, and that there were tears under the dark eyelashes. Her impulse was to follow Sophy up-stairs, and to speak loving words that might be helpful to her. But something made it hard for her to choose the right words to speak, and she let the opportunity pass, saying to herself that perhaps the flickering firelight had deceived her, and that Sophy would repel any advice from her.

She took herself sorely to task afterwards and wept bitterly that night in her own room, because Satan had cast his shackles about her and had caused her to hold her peace from speaking good words; but it is from the fullness of the heart that the tongue speaketh, and just then Mercy's heart was filled entirely with the vision of a handsome face whose owner would shortly come to bid her farewell, before he sailed for the Old World.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARTHUR DONNYCOURT'S DEPARTURE.

FROM that time Sophy began to go about listlessly, and to find it hard work to keep from fretful words at slight annoyances. She brooded in secret over the approaching visit of Donnycourt. For a moment she had thought that she would certainly manage that Nathanael should be at home when Donnycourt came; but it was only for a moment. Then she remembered that Nathanael would almost certainly be away at that time, for he had made an arrangement with a neighbor, who lived at a considerable distance, to take him over a load of corn on the first Monday in November to exchange for pork; and, unless the weather became too mild for Goodman Wilson to kill his pigs, Nathanael would be absent that day and night; for, as he could not return till long after nightfall, he had been cordially pressed to take a bed there.

Instead of milder weather, the winds grew colder and sharper. Some of the last of the bright autumn leaves, now grown brown and dry, fluttered down with each gust, to add to the thick carpet that lay in

rustling heaps about the roots of the trees now spreading their branches black and bare against the wintry sky.

Nathanael noticed the change in his wife, and it troubled him sorely; but she did not respond to any attempts on his part to renew the subject that she had so strangely and unexpectedly broached. He could only wait, patiently bearing with her unusual moods and trusting that the Holy Spirit was working in her heart.

On Monday morning her temper was more uneven that ever before; she even spoke in irritable tones to her husband when he expressed anxiety about her pale cheeks and heavy eyes. He delayed his departure until nearly noon, and then drove away feeling sadly disturbed.

As his road led him past Douglas Folinsbee's house, he stopped for a moment to speak with Douglas about the wagon, which he had hired from him. A strange horse was tied to the fence; and as he entered the low porch that sheltered the door he caught a glimpse of a slightly built man with clean-shaven face, who looked out of the window as if expecting some one and then drew back. Douglas was not at home, so Nathanael did not go in; and mounting again to his seat the wagon was soon creaking and lumbering over the rough and deeply rutted roads.

Meanwhile in the kitchen at home Sophy was busied feverishly and nervously clearing away the dishes after the early dinner, while little Penelope was at her favorite employment polishing the pewter plates till they shone like silver, and she could see the reflection of her own, sweet, quiet face in them. Mercy's voice was heard at the top of the stairs calling to Sophy, who reluctantly laid down the cloth and went up-stairs to speak to her.

"You will go with me, Sophy," said Mercy anxiously.

"Not I," replied Sophy irritably, "if he wishes to come to the house fair and open, let him come. I'll go to no neighbor's house to meet him."

"It was my fault, Sophy," pleaded Mercy; "you angered me by the way you spoke of him, and I wrote to him not to come here, but that if he would stop at the Folinsbee house, I often went there to inquire for Goody."

"You wrote that, yet you never said a word to me of it!" exclaimed Sophy. "And you even asked me to write to give him leave to come hither!"

"That did I not," replied Mercy, her color rising, and her eyes beginning to expand and darken, as they were wont to do on rare occasions when she was thoroughly roused. "You had insulted him by your words, and when you followed me and offered to

write, my letter was already folded and I merely told you to do as you would."

A crash in the kitchen made them both start and Sophy with an exclamation of annoyance ran hastily down the stairs. Penelope was picking up with shamefaced confusion a pewter plate that had slipped from her little fingers, as she was zealously polishing its surface. No harm was done and having scolded the child for her carelessness, Sophy stood for a moment, half inclined to tell Mercy that she would accompany her.

The sound of footsteps overhead decided her wavering mind.

"She has gone back to her room," she thought; "no doubt she thinks the matter settled and will stay quietly at home and cry over it. But a few tears now are better than a sore heart by and by, and truly the whole affair were better broken off."

It did occur to her that Mercy, when roused, showed more disposition to act than to weep, but she put aside the thought uneasily, assuring herself that if Mercy would do such an unmaidenly thing as to go to meet her lover at a neighbor's house, she at least would not be mixed up with such conduct.

The footsteps ceased overhead and there was complete silence, but just as the work was finished and Sophy was taking the fine birch broom to sweep into

graceful curves the freshly strewn sand on the floor, she heard a light foot descending the stairs and Mercy entered the kitchen, wrapped in her grey cloak, her face pale but determined, under the wide brimmed hat that was tied securely over her ears with a long veil.

"I am going down to Elspeth Folinsbee's, have you any message?" she said quietly, mindful of appearances before the quick eyes and ears of little Pen.

"If I had a message it would need to be an important one, for me to let you go out with it on such a raw blustering afternoon," retorted Sophy, too much vexed to be careful even in the presence of the child.

"I shall not be gone long," replied Mercy, slipping outside and quickly shutting the door to avoid farther words.

The cold gust of air that filled the kitchen in that short moment made Sophy shiver. She even put down her broom and went to stretch her hands to the blaze, and sharp-eyed Penelope noticed that they trembled. When she turned away again to her sweeping, her checks were crimson and her eyes big and bright; but she finished her work and sat down with her work-basket, and then calling Penelope to her side, began to instruct her in the art of stitching a wristband for a shirt. Her head ached and the

threads she was trying to draw danced in confusion before her eyes. A foreboding of evil seemed to press upon her, until she almost felt that it would be a relief to scream aloud, or to do something strange and startling to relieve her pent-up feelings. If Elspeth had seen her in her present mood she would have said that some one had cast an evil eye on her. And even Penelope was alarmed.

"Mother, why do you shiver when your hands are burning hot?" she asked as her hand happened to touch her mother's in taking her work.

"'Tis nothing, child," answered Sophy impatiently. "There; take up two threads and skip three. Don't be so careless. You have put in your needle quite wrong."

Penelope's eyes opened wide with amazement, for her needle was placed exactly as she had been bidden. Sophy hastily snatched the work from her hands to alter it, but everything swam before her eyes and stitching was an impossibility. Bewildered she dropped the wristband in her lap and leaned her head on the table before her. Penelope anxiously asked what ailed her, and tried with little endearments to attract her attention, but her mother fell to weeping violently and then in her efforts to control her tears broke out into hysterical laughter.

Terrified Penelope began to think of a fast that

she had been told was kept a year ago for the bewitched son of Job Purdy, and she wondered desperately if it would do any good to bring the Prayer-Book to her mother. Her first impulse was to run for her Aunt Mercy, but she dared not leave her mother alone.

The sight of the child's white, scared face steadied Sophy's nerves for a moment and she said in quick gasps:

"Don't be frightened, my little maid. I'll go upstairs and lie down for awhile till Aunt Mercy comes back."

"May I run to fetch her?" asked Penelope. "I'll go very fast."

"It is too far to send you. It is growing late," said her mother feebly.

"It is not near dusk," replied Penelope, "and indeed it is not far. Please let me go."

Sophy felt herself that both for body and mind it would be a great relief to see Mercy again by her side and she nodded a silent assent. She then sank down on the wooden settle too weak and chilly to go upstairs. Penelope brought a pillow and shawl to make her mother as comfortable as she could. Then donning in a trice her hood and pelisse she started off as fast as her feet could carry her towards Douglas Folinsbee's. It was hard work running against the

wind and when she reached the door of Elspeth's tidy kitchen she was almost breathless.

To her great surprise old Goody, who generally sheltered her rheumatic bones in the warmest chimney nook, opened the door to her and asked sharply, what she wanted.

"Mother is not like herself. I don't know what is wrong. We want Aunt Mercy," gasped the breathless child.

"Well, well, sit down and take breath," said Goody; but at the sound of Penelope's voice, Mercy herself came in hastily from the front room.

"What is it, Pen? tell me, dear," she exclaimed excitedly.

"Mother seems so strange. She shivers and her hands burn, and she laughs and cries," said poor Pen, herself almost crying. "Do come fast, Aunt Mercy."

"That's no put-on ailment; it sounds like fever," muttered Goody, then added aloud: "Gang awa' in and get your cloak and hat, lassie. The bairn maun get her breath."

Mercy disappeared into the front room, and at the same moment a small, clean-shaven man came out. Though Penelope could hardly speak, she had no difficulty in hearing, and she distinctly caught the sound of a man's voice and her Aunt Mercy replying in low, agitated tones.

"Whisht, whisht! what fules they be!" cried Goody, exchanging quick glances with the gentleman, as she hobbled towards the door with more noise than necessary.

As she opened it Mercy came out, and though the broad brim of her hat was well over her face and she was tying on her veil, Penelope noticed that she looked as if she had been weeping.

"Come, child," she said, "be quick;" and she went towards the door holding out her hand to Penelope. The gentleman bowed silently as she passed, but as she opened the door Goody came bustling out crying:

"Hoot, hoot, lassie, are ye fey? The lines, tak the lines wi' ye;" and she thrust a slip of paper into Mercy's hand.

The blood rushed to Mercy's pale face, but she took the paper, and with a hasty good-bye drew Penelope out into the blustering November wind.

She regained her composure as they walked rapidly homeward, and Penelope felt more at ease now that she really had her Aunt Mercy with her, she even recovered herself enough to ask with childlike curiosity:

"Aunt Mercy, is Cousin Donnycourt coming up to the house?"

"Nonsense, child. What do you mean?" asked Mercy sharply.

"I hope he is not," replied Penelope simply; "for

he always brings trouble to mother, and father does not like him."

"Then you had better not talk about him to them," said Mercy, trying to speak indifferently, though her voice trembled slightly. "If your mother has fever, she must be kept very quiet and composed."

"Very well," replied Penelope and was silent till they reached the house door.

A glance showed Mercy that Sophy was seriously ailing. The first care was to get her to bed and the next to fetch the bag of herbs, all sorted and labeled for cases of sickness. Mercy had had much experience in nursing and doctoring, and though she regretted that Nathanael was away she did not feel very anxious.

As evening closed in and the simple remedies she had prepared did not produce the usual effect her anxiety increased, and she wished she had asked Elspeth to come up to help her. She gave Penelope her supper, and as the fever had increased and the stupor, which Mercy had hoped would turn into refreshing sleep, was passing off and Sophy was rousing into excited, half-wandering snatches of talk, Mercy thought it best to send the child to bed without allowing her again to go into her mother's room.

She then sat by Sophy's bedside, until noticing that she seemed inclined to doze, but was roused to talk

by having a listener by her side she slipped down-stairs to cover the kitchen fire and close up the house for the night.

Her surprise and her relief were very great as the kitchen door opened and Nathanael himself walked in. The cheery greeting on his lips was checked as he saw Mercy alone.

"Where is Sophy?" he asked quickly.

"Indeed, brother, I like not the turn she has taken. I got her to bed, but the fever does not abate," replied Mercy.

Without staying for more words Nathanael mounted the narrow stairs, two steps at a time. The sight of his wife's flushed face and glittering eyes greatly alarmed him. She knew him, but began to talk so eagerly and incoherently that he had great difficulty in soothing her.

When she became more tranquil he left the room, and hastened down-stairs; then beckoning to Mercy, he said:

"This is something serious, we must have advice as quickly as possible. Do you watch her closely while I try to get a doctor."

He hastened to the stable and without waiting to saddle Black Bess he sprang on her back and making a bridle of the halter rode rapidly away towards Douglas Folinsbee's, to learn from him where the

nearest doctor could be found. Douglas himself came to the door at the sound of hoofs, and Nathanael shouted his inquiry through the whistling of the wind.

"'Tis a lang gait," replied Douglas, "to Doctor Avery's, but bide a wee; there's a sort o' doctor chap within doors at the very moment. He's frae Boston and is stayed wi' a horse that cast a shoe. Wull ye hae him up to the house to see the mistress? Ye'll no find Doctor Avery the night I'm thinking."

"Who is he?" asked Nathanael chafed at the delay, and rendered more anxious as he perceived the chance of getting a doctor to be small.

"His name's Rogers. He's a bit o' a doctor, and a bit o' a parson, and a bit o' a soldier, as near as I can come at it," replied Douglas. "Anyhow he's a douse body I'm thinking; and it 'ull do nae harm to ask his opinion till the morn's morn, when ye can get Doctor Avery by gude daylight."

Without more palaver Douglas stepped back into the kitchen and soon came out and hastened to the stable to fetch out one of his horses, while a figure appeared in the doorway. By the glow of candle and firelight Nathanael recognized the same face that he had seen at the window at noon.

The stranger's tones and manners were kindly and courteous as he offered to do anything in his

power to serve him. There was really no choice, and Nathanael could only reply with thanks and apologies and in a few minutes they were cantering up the lane again.

Mercy's face flushed almost as deep a crimson as the fever-stricken cheeks of her patient, when Nathanael came in and presented to her Mr. Rogers; but in a few minutes she had forgotten all embarrassment in a new terror. For the stranger, after a short but careful examination of the patient, said in low tones to Nathanael:

"You cannot take too much precaution, sir. Unless I am greatly mistaken your wife is sickening with the small-pox."

CHAPTER XIX.

REUBEN SEATON DISAPPEARS.

MR. ROGERS, whatever might be his profession, was correct in his opinion of Sophy's illness. Nathanael insisted that he must stay the night, and he could not have gone back to the Folinsbees from the bedside of a small-pox patient.

"You see I have no need to dread it for myself," he said, as he touched one or two faint scars on his own face. "I have been inoculated and I had a pretty bad attack then; but you, sir, have you been inoculated, or any of your family?"

"No," replied Nathanael, in a tone of dull despair, "perhaps Mercy—" but she too shook her head.

"Do not be down-hearted," said Mr. Rogers. "If you can get some one who is skillful and proof against the disease to nurse your wife, I have no doubt she will pull through. I have seen very serious cases recover all right and not very bad marks left either. But you need a good nurse."

"I have been counted not ill as a nurse," replied Mercy quietly, "and you may be sure, brother, that I will do my best for Sophy."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Rogers, "what—" but he was checked by a quiet motion from Mercy.

"I have no fear. And if I had, you see, I have already been attending my sister-in-law," she said. "I could not leave her to any one else. Of course, if Dorothy were here she could do much better than I can; but I shall do my best. Nathanael, keep up good heart."

As she spoke she took up a draught that Mr. Rogers had been preparing for the patient, and went back into her room.

As she shut the door gently behind her and went to the bedside, it struck her that she was shutting out the world. Penelope must be kept away from her, and any direct intercourse by letter with Dorothy, with Reuben, with Donnycourt must be given up.

"He told me to write to him before he sails, but I cannot do it now. What will he think?" Her brow contracted anxiously, but soon the frown relaxed and a peacefully contented expression shone from her eyes.

"I am glad now that I did not say him, 'Nay.' I could not have explained, and he might have gone off angry. Yes, it is better as it is," she whispered to herself. "I was sorry at first, but the Lord is merciful, and he will make the pathway plain before me."

Thus comforting herself, Mercy lulled to rest her sensitive conscience, and began the long and arduous

task of nursing that lay before her. It was well for her peace of mind that she could not at that moment look into the familiar kitchen at the old Fythe Farm, where Dorothy sat with strained and anxious face listening to Mr. John Brown who, in his quick, commanding tones, was saying:

"Do not distress yourself, madam. I am going on to Boston this week, and I will look up the boy and bring him home. Be sure no harm has befallen him. He is, no doubt, enjoying himself and needs a touch of discipline to make him remember his duty."

Mr. John Brown was a man of such remarkable energy that anything which he undertook was sure to be accomplished if it lay within the bounds of possibility; and Dorothy's distress was really caused almost as much by the thought that Reuben had disregarded her wishes and desires, by remaining so long with friends in Boston, as by actual fear that any mishap might have befallen the lad.

The shock was terrible to her when a week later Mrs. Nicholas Brown brought her the tidings, that Reuben had left Boston and that for the last ten days no one knew what had become of him.

"He was staying last with Mr. Martin," said Mrs. Brown, "and Mrs. John Brown writes to my husband that they heard that Reuben went about much with a young English officer. Mr. Martin has little cause

to be much pleased with any intercourse with the English officers. The troubles of the March riots are too fresh in his mind. But he understood that this young man was some kin to Reuben or to your family, and therefore he did not take it amiss. When the lad left their house, last Monday week, he gave it out that he was going with this Captain Donnycourt for a short jaunt, and then would travel straight homewards."

"And where is this Captain Donnycourt," asked Dorothy with stern voice and kindling eyes. "I thank God that he is no kin of mine. You remember him, Mrs. Brown. A gay ne'er-do-well, lounging about the town for no good or useful ends that I could ever learn eighteen months or more ago. He claimed to be some kin to my brother's wife, but he is none of ours, and I misliked the fellow from the first hour he darkened this door. Where is he, that I may go and demand my son of him? I will weary him with my importunities, as the widow wearied the unjust judge. Could he find none to entrap into his evil ways but the only son of a widow?"

It was rarely that the reserved and quiet Dorothy had been heard to pour forth such a torrent of hot and angry words; but Mrs. Brown's answer cut short both her words and her wrath.

"The young captain sailed for England last week."

"For England!" repeated Dorothy, as she sank back into the chair, from which in her excitement she had risen. "What could he want to lure my boy to England for?" And she looked in despairing wonder at the visitor.

"Mr. Brown writes that he made strict inquiry, and he finds that Reuben did not sail with Captain Donnycourt," said Mrs. Brown. "He is now trying by every means to get track of the lad in Boston, or the neighborhood. And though thus far it has been without success, he hopes, with the help of God, to restore him to you safe and sound."

Dorothy sat with head slightly bent forward, her hands lying in her lap. She did not speak until Mrs. Brown laid her hand gently on her arm, saying:

"It is a sore trial, but he who sends it will know how to temper it to you."

Then Dorothy straightened herself in her chair and answered in a voice that sounded harsh from the constraint which she put upon herself.

"The Lord has seen fit to afflict me grievously, but I trust that I shall not fail in my duty of resignation to his will."

Mrs. Brown looked at her with an expression of anxious sympathy, and then said in low tones, but with marked emphasis:

"Yes, all things we know work together for good to those who love God."

Dorothy opened her lips as if to speak, but closed them again and relapsed into the same attitude of stern submission.

There was no outward show of a rebellious spirit, no clenched hands, no tightly set lips as if to keep herself back from crying out against the blow that had shattered her dearest hopes. But every line of face and figure was stubbornly passive, as if she were saying:

"The Almighty has the right to torture the creatures he has made, if it so please him; theirs is the duty to bear without sign of murmur. No one shall say that I fail in that duty."

Mrs. Rhoda Brown's gentle, loving heart was sorely pained, and she went away feeling strangely depressed and repelled.

It was well that the news of Sophy's illness arrived at this time; for the mood of resolute endurance of her great trial into which Dorothy was hardening herself would have caused her to turn a stony face towards the bright and pretty little matron who had first brought Donnycourt into the house. But her feelings were softened by the thought of her lying on her sick bed bereft of all brightness and beauty, her life itself threatened by the terrible scourge.

All inquiries concerning Reuben proved unavailing. Nathanael, when written to, could give no clue. He carefully kept this new trouble from Mercy, who needed all her strength both mental and physical to support her through the long days and nights during which Sophy lay battling for her life.

Mr. John Brown at length gave up the search, and returned to Providence.

"Depend upon it, the fellow has run away to sea," he remarked to his brother Nicholas. "He will turn up all right after awhile; and, no doubt, with a good deal of nonsense knocked out of him."

"I don't feel so sure about the matter," replied Nicholas. "If he wanted to go to sea, why should he run away in a Boston vessel? Here are you and I with plenty of sail on the seas and with the will, as well as the power, to give him a good start. I would have helped him for his mother's sake."

"He knew that his mother wanted to make a preacher of him," said John; "and instead of speaking his mind, he has taken this cowardly way of sneaking out of it. I should say that he deserves a good cowhide, if it were not that I am tolerably sure he has already had a pretty good taste of a rope end."

This was as far as any one got in the matter, though it made a great talk for a time, and while

some held with Mr. John Brown that the lad had ran away to sea; others talked of foul play, and raked up stories of strange discoveries of bones in out of the way places; and still a third party shook their heads mysteriously, giving no opinions as to the facts of the case, but drawing lessons from it with a zeal that drove the poor mother to sterner and harder reserve.

There was only one person with whom she slightly relaxed, and that was Jonathan Pursell. He was the last one who had seen her boy. She questioned him once about Reuben's looks and manner when he met him in Boston; and Jonathan, after telling the meagre details of that short interview, added:

"I misdoubt that I managed ill. A young fellow does not like to feel that he is watched and mounted guard over like a baby. I managed ill and was too easily huffed."

Dorothy knew the man too well not to understand that these quiet words betrayed the source of much self-reproach to one of his tender conscience and strict ideas of duty. She roused herself to say, with something of her old earnestness and kindliness:

"I know that you would never have left his side, had you foreseen what would be in his mind. But you could not foresee. It is the fault of no one except—" She stopped herself and then added drearily,

"It is no good talking. It is the will of God, and we have no right to murmur against that."

But she seemed to like to have Jonathan come to see her; and from that time on he was very regular in visiting the house from which all attractions to ordinary visitors had fled.

When the news came that Mercy was staying to nurse Sophy, it was a shock to Jonathan that almost led him to betray the feelings so long and carefully repressed. But Dorothy was too much dulled and deadened by the former blow to notice the expression of his face; and, for herself, she took the danger to Mercy as another trial that must be endured without questioning. But, alas she was without that trusting confidence in the wise ruling of a loving Father, which makes such silent submission work for good.

There was one quiet little damsel who shed many tears in secret over Reuben's disappearance, and who also had her own opinions on the matter. She kept them, however, in her own wise little pate, partly because nobody asked for them, partly because she was not sure that she was at liberty to repeat all the glowing day dreams that Reuben had confided to her. This was Penelope. She was so quiet and discreet that her father often forgot, and spoke in her presence of matters that were not intended for her ears. Now when he was unable to confide this trouble to Sophy

or to Mercy, and when, on account of the risk of carrying infection, he was shut out from going to Boston to search actively for Reuben, he took refuge in talking of the whole affair to this wise little daughter; though it must be owned he did it much after the fashion of a solitary individual discoursing to his dog or cat.

Mr. Rogers had returned to Boston as soon as Doctor Avery was summoned. Indeed he took care to be off before the doctor's arrival, lest he might be placed in quarantine. The great precautions that he took to disinfect his person and clothing proved to Nathanael that he fully understood the deadly disease with which he had been brought into contact, and also the proper means to be used to avoid carrying the infection.

Soon after he left a heavy snow-storm came on and the little family were for a time shut in with their anxiety and sorrow. In Sophy's case the disease did not assume its most malignant form, but her restlessness made her a very difficult person to manage.

Mercy had laid down as a rule that no one but herself and the doctor should enter the sick room. It was very trying for Nathanael, but as he was assured that the disease was in a mild form, he assented to the severe, but necessary precaution. Thus it happened that no one but Mercy heard any of the disconnected words that Sophy let fall at times when her mind wan-

dered and occasionally the names of Donnycourt and Mercy were on her lips.

An old woman had been sent by the doctor, who attended to the cooking and the housekeeping, and thus the slow days dragged past, until at length the worst was over, and Sophy began to improve. Then came the hardest task for Mercy.

Hitherto Sophy had not been clear enough in her mind to ask what ailed her; or, if she asked, her questions had been easily put off; but now that she was really gaining and asked for her husband and for Penelope, Mercy could no longer keep from her the name of her disease.

She had been lying quietly watching Mercy's gentle, peaceful face, at last she remarked languidly:

"I have been ill a long time, Mercy, have I not? I don't remember ever feeling quite so badly before with cold and feverishness. Did the doctor think it serious?"

"Oh, you are much better now!" replied Mercy cheerfully. "He thought you needed great care, but the fever did not take a very serious turn."

"I am glad of that," replied Sophy musingly; then, after a short pause, she added: "I don't want to get anything serious until I have done more good in the world. I have been thinking over what I spoke of before I was taken ill. I fancy Nathanael

did not think I was in earnest. He thought that I spoke lightly and without reflection; but I really mean to join the Baptist Church, and to do all the good I can in it. You see I might just as well do so, for it is not likely that we shall ever go back to England to live, and I feel sure it would please Nathanael."

Though her voice was low and faint, she spoke with a smiling ease that puzzled poor Mercy sorely. She could not frame an answer hastily, and before she replied, Sophy began to speak again.

"I should like to talk to Nathanael about it. When is he coming in to see me? You are a charming nurse, sweetheart; but he does not usually stay away, if he knows that I am laid up. Let him come in, dear."

"He is out just now, and you must rest a little longer," replied Mercy quietly.

"Then where is Penelope? She is such a quiet little nurse, she never tires me. Do these pimples on my face make me a shocking fright?"

Mercy tried to put aside these questions, but Sophy with her mental faculties no longer clouded, could not be easily satisfied. She caught the idea that something was wrong with her husband or her child, and she was becoming so much agitated, that Mercy found that of the two evils the least to be dreaded was a

simple statement of the true reason why she was thus secluded.

She spoke very gently and cheeringly; but at the word "small-pox" Sophy gave a little scream of horror, and then covered her face with both hands.

"You are getting well so fast now," said Mercy in the same quiet tones, "that you will soon be able to be about again as usual. We are all thankful that it has been a comparatively light attack."

Sophy did not reply; but after a long silence, she said in a broken voice:

"Bring me the little glass, Mercy. Let me see what a fright I am."

"No, never mind that now," said Mercy decidedly. "When you are able to sit up we will get the glass and don all your bravery. But I cannot let you inspect my patient in night-cap and curl-papers. She must look her best when you see her."

She spoke with an attempt at brightness, and Sophy did not press the matter. But Mercy saw that her caution had been of but little avail. Her imagination pictured her poor disfigured face far more repulsive than it actually was; and she now evidently shrank from being seen by her husband and child, as much as she had before desired it. Her recovery continued to advance favorably, but she was too much disheartened to make the most of her returning strength.

At last Mercy decided that it would do no harm, and might do good to let her see herself and to interest her in dressing her head to the best advantage. Sophy after the first glance let her do as she pleased and relapsed into listless indifference. Mercy tried other means to rouse her, and one day overcoming her shyness, she tried to draw Sophy to speak upon matters of religion.

"What does that matter now?" exclaimed Sophy, with petulant anger; "I can be no credit to any one now. The best that I can do is to hide myself from sight, so that Nathanael will have the less cause to be ashamed of me."

And she burst into a passion of tears that it took all Mercy's patience and soothing to stop.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BURNING OF THE GASPEE.

WHILE his friends were thus passing through trials that brought out the gold in them, and relentlessly showed what was merely dross covered with tinsel, Jonathan Pursell was steadily continuing his studies at the Rhode Island College, with a simple, earnest faith and a conscientious perseverance, that stood him in place of more brilliant gifts, and led President Manning to watch his course with more than usual interest.

The College Building was near completion. It was a neat brick building designed to accommodate over a hundred students, and all the present students, twenty-two in number were accommodated within its walls. The meagre library of two hundred and fifty not well-chosen volumes, and the insignificant philosophical apparatus cost President Manning much thought. All the money collected outside of the colonies for the College had been applied to an endowment fund; but the amount did not exceed nine hundred pounds sterling, and the interest on this sum was not sufficient to meet the expenses of tuition.

The fact that the College was especially under the control of Baptists, and that this control was secured to them by the terms of the charter, caused it to be slighted or unfavorably noticed by those in other denominations from whom assistance might naturally have been expected in the support of an institution for the spread of learning and polite education. But the President was not the man to be disheartened. He worked steadily at home, and he sought by every means in his power to excite interest in the other provinces and in England. To Dr. Thomas Llewellyn of London he wrote in February, 1772, giving full accounts of the prosperity and of the needs of the new institution; and strong hopes were entertained, that Dr. Llewellyn would endow the College handsomely; but already the cloud was lowering that should for a time render all efforts in the cause of learning useless and impossible.

The windy month of March had hardly begun, when a new vessel appeared in the waters of Narragansett Bay. President Manning and Mr. John Brown were standing one bright morning on the College Hill, looking out over the fine view of town and bay that the eminence commanded, when Mr. Brown suddenly interrupted his conversation on College matters, to exclaim:

"Do you see that vessel down yonder? That is

the miserable wasp that has been sent here from Boston to harass us, forever stinging and buzzing about our ears. She is even now chasing one of our packets, if my eyes do not deceive me."

"Is it the Gaspee?" inquired the President looking with deep interest in the direction indicated by his friend. "Her presence works great evil to the shipping interests I understand."

"Truly it does!" replied Mr. Brown with ill-suppressed irritation. "Under pretense of enforcing the revenue laws, there is not a craft in the bay, from the smallest to the largest, that is not liable to be overhauled and stopped at any time when it pleases her commander, Lieutenant Duddington, to make himself troublesome. If it were a question of fair and honest precaution against illegal trading, I could see that we had no right to complain. But this matter of forcing upon us goods that we do not want, and harrying us with the tyranny of these high-handed custom officers, is more than men of spirit can endure. There will be evil times ahead, Mr. President, if these things continue."

"We have, however, cause for thankfulness that the law has been repealed under which our brethren at Ashfield suffered such injury and oppression," said President Manning, willing to change the subject, which was, of course, a very irritating one to a man

of the sturdy and commanding spirit of his friend, a man too whose fortune was so largely involved in the shipping interests. "It was a marvelous surprise to their enemies when the King's repeal came so speedily."

"It is an instance where the fears of the weak and evil-minded work for the benefit of the right," replied Mr. Brown. "Governor Hutchinson is not so well liked in Boston that he can afford to lose any good will. There are times when the support of even a despised and oppressed minority is worth enough to make those in authority desirous to count on it. It was Hutchinson who wrote to Bernard to interest himself in the repeal of this law, and thus the matter was brought to the Royal notice more speedily than could have otherwise have been effected."

"It will not rest there, I fear," observed the President. "They will gain the ear of the Assembly at last, and will work ill to us again."

"They have made the trial," said Mr. Brown, "but the Governor will not sign any law framed for their benefit until he gets them more fully over to his interests. What the result will be, we shall see. I prophesy a mitigation of the tax on the Baptists."

"Not a complete doing away with all these petty oppressions?" asked the President.

"No, the times are not ripe for that yet," replied

Mr. Brown. "Rhode Island stands alone in her adherence to complete freedom. What may come in the struggle before us, it is hard to foretell; but we shall certainly not have any *heavier* yoke fastened on us; and it will go hard if we do not break off the one that galls us now."

"I hear that Mr. Davis is in very ill health," said President Manning; "I fear that he will be unable to do anything for us, as the Warren Association desired last fall."

"He is breaking down," said Mr. Brown, shaking his head gravely. "My brother Nicholas tells me the work will fall on Mr. Backus, unless he is much mistaken in his judgment of Mr. Davis' case."

Although the conversation had turned from the sore subject of Lieutenant Duddington and the Gaspee, the matter was not to be thus easily dropped from the public mind.

Complaint had been made to Deputy Governor Sessions, and the opinion of Chief Justice Hopkins was given clearly and decidedly, that "any person who should come into the colony and exercise any authority by force of arms, without showing his commission to the Governor, and, if a custom house officer, without being sworn into his office, was guilty of a trespass, if not of piracy." But when a sheriff was sent on board the Gaspee to ascertain by what orders the Lieu-

tenant acted, he referred them to Admiral Montague in Boston, and the only reply vouchsafed was:

"The Lieutenant has done his duty. I shall give the King's officers directions that they send every man taken in molesting them to me. As sure as the people of Newport attempt to rescue any vessel, and any of them are taken, I will hang them as pirates."

It was while public affairs were in this tinder-like condition that Mercy returned to Providence. Sophy had recovered, but she was too weak and ailing in body and in mind for Mercy to leave her; Penelope also was taken with a very mild form of the disease, so that the New Year was at hand before Mercy could even speak of returning home.

Then a succession of snow-storms made the traveling so difficult that she was forced to remain still longer at Chelmsford. But from the time when Nathanael broke to her as gently as possible the sad tidings of Reuben's disappearance, she was very anxious to return and distressed by every new obstacle that rose to hinder her from hurrying to her sister. The name of Donnycourt had not been mentioned. Mr. Brown attached but little importance to the lad's intercourse with the young captain, and when he had learned that Donnycourt sailed alone, he dismissed that matter from his mind.

Thus it was not until Mercy arrived at home,

towards the end of March, that she heard any mention of Donnycourt in connection with the matter. She was painfully affected by the change that sorrow and suspense had wrought in Dorothy; and the first time that Jonathan Pursell called at the Farm after her return, he found her almost in tears. She made an effort to recover herself and to greet him with her usual quiet friendliness, but it was hardly successful.

"We have had much trouble since last I saw you, Mr. Pursell," she said; "and I find my sister sadly changed."

If Jonathan had spoken what was in his thought, he would have replied that she herself was greatly changed. Although she had escaped the disease, all the watching and nursing, together with her anxieties both hidden and expressed, had left their marks upon the fair face. There was also a sadly wistful expression in her eyes, that made Jonathan fiercely rage at his powerlessness to help her. He muttered some words of sympathy, but Dorothy's entrance interrupted their conversation and the talk turning upon Nathanael's family Jonathan took refuge in inquiries after their health and well-being.

"Mrs. Rodman has but poorly regained her strength, and the hard winter has been much against her," replied Mercy.

"I hope that she will heed the warning that such a

visitation always brings to those who can read it aright," said Dorothy in her grave voice, that sorrow and habitual repression had made almost stern.

"I think, sister, that Sophy has more serious thoughts than one might suppose," said Mercy diffidently. "She certainly took unusual interest in the welfare of the new Baptist Church in Chelmsford, and just the night before she was taken with the fever, she was speaking with great indignation about the persecutions in Ashfield."

"Well, God grant her a changed heart! I bear her no ill-will," said Dorothy. "She was thoughtless and giddy, but I would not hold her responsible for the ill-deeds of her kin. She could not tell what an evil day it was for us when she brought that young captain to our door."

Jonathan, who was facing Mercy, saw her turn deadly pale. She glanced with a terrified and startled look at her sister; then she lowered her eyes, and striving hard to steady her voice, said inquiringly:

"You mean——?"

"Don't say his name, child!" interrupted Dorothy harshly. "If he gives me back my son, I will pray that I may not be slow to accord him Christian forgiveness. Till then——"

She shut her lips tightly and took up her knitting.

Jonathan, still watching Mercy saw her countenance

change, as with a sudden relief. She was still very pale and her voice trembled, but evidently some load had been lifted from her mind, as she leaned forward and said gently:

"Dorothy, dear sister, I had not heard. It is not possible that you thought there was any connection between Reuben and——"

Again Dorothy interrupted her:

"I know, I know, child. I have heard what people say—that Reuben disappeared on the Monday before this young man sailed—and that he went alone. Well, well, let it be, let it be. The workings of Satan are hidden cunningly; but the evil deed shall be brought to light."

She was evidently strongly moved, and Jonathan here interposed, with a remark concerning the journey of Mr. John Brown to Boston. The conversation glided into other topics, as exciting, but less personal. The movements of the Gaspee, the insolent manner in which Lieutenant Duddington plundered the inhabitants of the Island, the wanton firing upon vessels, and the heavy expense to which owners were put, in order to recover goods that were needlessly detained, the cost in some cases amounting to more than the goods were worth,—all these afforded safe topics and before he took leave the usual harmony was apparently restored.

In truth it was but apparently, for Mercy was greatly shocked by the discovery of this new bitterness against Donnycourt in her sister's mind, and at the same time she felt that a word from her would clear Donnycourt; for was he not in Chelmsford the very day on which Reuben disappeared? Her sense of justice urged her to tell this fact to her sister, but the thought of the questions that would follow, as to his business in Chelmsford, and as to how she was cognizant of his movements, closed her lips.

Jonathan, meanwhile, was striding towards the town, at each step bringing his boot down on the hard frozen ground as though he would crush under his heavy tread the miserable suspicions and the bitter disappointment that were driving him to despairing anger.

"He has spoken to her. He has induced her to pledge herself secretly. What else could have made her look so terrified and afterwards so relieved?" such were the thoughts that chased through his brain. "A brave soldier truly, to sneak thus into a house and win a maiden's troth, without fair and honorable proposals to her family! But I must keep away. I nearly made a fool of myself this evening; and of what avail is it to stand by and see her suffer when I cannot lift a finger to aid her?" then his anger was quenched under a wave of misery.

But Jonathan was not the man to let selfish passion get the upper hand. It was not the absence of faults, but the steady battle that he waged to subdue them, that caused him to be respected by those who learned to know him. But the very effort he made to raise himself increased his power of suffering. There was but little comparison between the sore disappointment felt by Jonathan Pursell, the aimlessly and discontentedly drifting young wheelwright, when two years ago he had complained to a companion in Olney's Tavern of the favor shown to Arthur Donnycourt at the Fythe Farm, and the misery that the present Jonathan Pursell bravely fought against in silence. Yet he went quietly back to his studies, took no one into his confidence, and continued to stop at times for a neighborly chat at the Fythe Farm. These visits were not frequent enough to occasion any gossip, but they sufficed to make the two women feel that they had in him a steady friend, upon whom they could rely in case of need. It was a school in which he learned many lessons of self-denial, that would be as valuable to him in his chosen profession as a minister of the gospel, as the Latin and Greek and other studies with which he was striving to raise his intellectual standard, and to increase his ability as an interpreter of the Scriptures.

The early spring time came with buds and blos-

soms, and fresh green, softening the brown skeleton of the trees and dark earth as it re-appeared from beneath its winter mantle of snow. May flowers had come and gone, and the early June roses were in bloom, when stirring news came to Providence.

Captain Lindsay, of the packet Hannah, who was justly proud of the speed of his craft, enjoyed giving the slip to the arrogant Gaspee, and on the ninth of June, as the Hannah was returning to Providence, closely chased by the Gaspee, he passed by Namquit Point in water deep enough for his small craft, but too shallow for the pursuing schooner, which ran aground fast and firm.

The news was no sooner conveyed to Providence, than a plan was concocted to redress the wrongs and annoyances of the last three months. At evening, the beat of the drum was heard along Main Street as a man, named Daniel Pearce, trudged along the sandy walk, summoning all who were spirited enough to engage in a bold undertaking, to repair to the Sabine Tavern.

A party was soon collected and that night, under the leadership of Mr. John Brown, a company of picked men in six or seven boats went out to the stranded schooner. Captain Abraham Whipple, one of the most trusted of Mr. Brown's shipmasters commanded the expedition and after three hours rowing

they approached the vessel. Lieutenant Duddington sprang on the rail, as they drew near and hailed them, and returned a defiant reply to their questions. At the same moment one of the men in the boats fired, and the Lieutenant fell back wounded.

The boat-crews at once boarded the schooner; after a short scuffle they captured and landed the crew, and from the Gaspee herself a long quivering flame shot up into the clear June night. Mr. John Brown was the last to leave the doomed vessel, and he delayed so long in his care that the work should be thoroughly done, and no vestige remain by which the attacking party could be identified or arrested, that he narrowly escaped with his life from the falling timbers and spars.

It was the first blow struck, the first blood shed, and the consequences—what were they to be? Whither would they lead? This was what none of the men engaged in that undertaking could foresee clearly. But at least they knew their own minds and the temper of their fellow-townsmen, for although the British Government, naturally hotly incensed, offered high rewards for their discovery and arrest, no one came forward to claim the reward.

Although the Fythe Farm was three miles out of town, Dorothy and Mercy had seen on the sky the reflection of the glare from the burning vessel and

news soon reached them of the actual facts. Dorothy was roused from her brooding over her own grief, by the eager interest that she took in this bold venture, and by her anxiety for the fate of the men who had carried it through. Not every one was brave, nor was every one patriotic, and Mr. John Brown knew that his position was now a hazardous one.

"Surely no one would be so base as to betray him!" exclaimed Mercy, when Jonathan Pursell in one of his visits spoke on the subject.

"I trust not," replied Jonathan; "but eternal vigilance is the only means to ensure his safety. He knows no fear himself, but by his friends' persuasions, he has been induced to sleep away from home; and I even know that bribes have been given to secure the silence of some who are weak enough to be tempted by the reward offered."

Mercy's eyes glowed with enthusiasm and her lips parted; but suddenly a chill seemed to fall on her and she turned away silently. Jonathan understood the quick change, and he too felt the shadow that had fallen on her. He did not show it as readily in his face, but he took his leave very soon and, as he strode along, he mentally questioned:

"Will it always be thus, that her natural interests and enthusiasm must be checked and repressed by the thought of that man? Of course in this matter his

sympathies are all with the British. Then too in matters of religion, if he cares for any church, it is for the Church of England. They can have nothing in common, unless one changes; and if he desires to settle in England when they are married, it is she who will have to change, or at least to repress all her own feelings and beliefs."

This conviction was gradually starting a new train of thought in Jonathan's mind that began to overthrow with amazing rapidity all the stern resolutions that he had formed, when he first imagined that he caught a glimpse of the state of Mercy's heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOPHY HAS UNWELCOME TIDINGS OF DONNYCOURT.

THE June sunlight was pouring in through the deep-set windows of Mrs. Hezekiah Smith's room at Haverhill; and, after darting mischievous glances into the dark eyes of a demure little maiden of ten summers, sitting on a low tabouret, with mittened hands decorously folded in her lap, it made a vain attempt to peep under the polished wooden top of a cradle.

Over this cradle the young mother of the sleeping baby was bending and noiselessly pointing out to an admiring friend the round rosy cheeks resting on the pillow, and the half closed fingers of the little hands that lay pink and dimpled on the coverlet. As they looked the fists began to flourish themselves, the sleepy eyes opened big and wondering, and their young owner, with gurgling and cooing sounds, that constituted as yet the whole of his vocabulary for conversational purposes, announced his readiness to be taken up.

"Ah, now you can see how much he has gained in expression," said his mother, as she lifted him proudly

from the cradle. "Come hither, Penelope, he will smile at you, if you snap your fingers to him. See, that was actually a laugh."

The baby crowed and flung out his fists, as if to catch at the pink sprigs that were scattered over the little girl's tasteful calico gown and then, as the older lady bent over him, he narrowly missed sticking an unmanageable little finger in her eye as he made a fruitless clutch at a truant curl that escaped from beneath her cap.

Those dark eyes and clustering curls were now the chief beauty left to the formerly pretty face of Mistress Sophy Rodman.

"Ah, you little sweeting," she exclaimed as she dangled the ribbons of her reticule just within his reach. "Who would have thought he would grow so bright in the six weeks since last I saw him. There, he has Penelope fast by the finger. Let him bite it, Pen, he cannot hurt you. Does he feel his teeth already, Mrs. Smith?"

Penelope was wholly willing to let his little majesty bite her fingers, pull her hair, and pommel her brown, rosy cheeks, and the two mothers were soon deep in wise discussion on baby lore.

The sound of voices and laughter floated out through the open window, on the rose perfumed breeze to the garden below, where Mr. Smith and Nathanael

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were walking to and fro on the gravel path in earnest conversation. The two men stopped and smiled.

"He is growing a fine sturdy little fellow for three months old," said Mr. Smith with fatherly pride, then he added more gravely: "God grant that we may be enabled to train him up to be a useful servant of our Lord and Master in the trying times that are coming."

"In truth, I do not see how the times can be more trying than they are at present," replied Nathanael rather bluntly. "Let us hope that they will improve ere that little youngster is breeched."

"I say, Amen, from the bottom of my heart," replied Mr. Smith. "But the improvement will not be brought about by supinely letting matters take their course. If all the Baptists were to follow the plan that you incline to adopt, and were to pay the taxes imposed for the support of the Standing Order, do you imagine that freedom of conscience in religious questions would ever be attained?"

Nathanael's deeply lined features wore a gloomy expression, and he crushed the gravel under his heavy tread, as if he were bearing an actual burden on his shoulders.

"It is no fear for myself that prompts me to submit to an oppression," he said at last. "You can judge of my feelings when I think that my wife and child may suffer."

"But would not your wife be the first to urge you to make a decided stand against oppression?" suggested Mr. Smith. "I have seen in her face the lively interest she feels in justice and right, even though she is not one with us."

"Yes," replied Nathanael, "her nature is honest and true to the core. She would stoop to no paltering or deception in any case. But is it not therefore the more incumbent on me to guard her from evil?"

"Many of those men who withstand the taxes laid upon us by the British Parliament have wives and children," said Mr. Smith. "But are they to be, as the eminent Lord Bacon hath it, 'hindrances in any great enterprise whether for good or for evil?' I would read it otherwise, and say, that they should hinder us from the evil and spur us on to the good. I see no other way to decide this matter than by the plain question of what is right and what is wrong. If a church has made a brave stand against unjust taxes, is it right that certain members thereof should for private ends compromise with the oppressors?"

Nathanael did not reply, and they took another turn in silence, then he questioned:

"Think you that these certificates will avail us anything? See in how many cases they have been twisted, and caviled at, and made out at the end to be but worthless paper."

"Yes, I have seen too much of that," replied Mr. Smith; "and in truth I would gladly have all this certificate business swept away. We must strike at the root of the matter, and cry out for complete religious liberty, as sturdily as we are crying for political freedom."

"We must have a care how we involve ourselves," said Nathanael, significantly. "It was the King who interposed to stop further persecution in the Ashfield matter. If in political questions we turn against our friends, can we hope that our enemies will show us greater consideration, if we are wholly in their power?"

Mr. Smith shook his head and smiled, as he replied:

"There again I can only remind you, that we must unflinchingly hold to the right, and never allow the question of expediency to lead us to help on wrong and oppression. In my opinion injustice is always inexpedient. If the British Parliament had been less overbearing and tyrannical in their measures, the spirit of rebellion would be less rife in the colonies to-day; and if all churches are moved by kindly and brotherly feelings on matters of religious faith, the kingdom of Christ will be advanced, and each one will receive more amply of the peace that he left with his disciples, that peace which the world giveth not."

Nathanael had again relapsed into silence. Mr. Smith's words about compromising with the oppressors had stung him, but he was not yet ready to make any reply.

Mr. Smith, who had that comparatively rare wisdom, which keeps a man from going on striking the nail on the head until he splits the board, broke the silence after a few more turns up and down the gravel path by remarking:

"I recently met a man who inquired about you and your family. His name is Rogers, and I believe he has been in his Majesty's service. I understood he had been surgeon in the army."

"Ah, I have good cause to remember him. But it was as parson that Folinsbee spoke of him," replied Nathanael. "Are you sure he was not chaplain?"

"I heard nothing of that, and he showed little fitness for any godly occupation," replied Mr. Smith.

"However that may be, he understands the care of bodies, for he rendered us kindly and efficient service, when my poor wife was taken with the small-pox," said Nathanael.

"He inquired particularly after her health and after that of her nurse," continued Mr. Smith; "I supposed that he meant Mistress Mercy Fythe and I assured him of her well-being. He seems to be tolerably informed concerning some of your family, for

he spoke of Captain Donnycourt, and of his approaching marriage to a lady of fortune in England."

"He might readily be much better informed than myself on matters connected with that young man," replied Nathanael, with no greater manifestation of interest than politeness required. "He is a cousin to my wife; but we have little communication. He sought us out shortly after our arrival at Chelmsford; but, though he was stationed for several months in Boston, we have never seen him again; so I fancy it was to mere curiosity that we were indebted for that mark of interest in our welfare."

"Will you deem it impertinent if I ask how Reuben became intimate with young Donnycourt?" asked Mr. Smith.

"That was but a boyish whim," replied Nathanael. "It has been made far too much of. I understand that my sister Dorothy will have it that he spirited the lad away; but that is only the error of a sorely burdened heart that seeks relief in laying the blame on some other than the beloved object. The lad was neither a rich nor a roystering companion, and I take it Arthur Donnycourt would make but a sour visage at the thought of being plagued with him."

The appearance of the ladies with the two children put a stop to the conversation, but Nathanael knowing that the fair sex generally take a lively interest in

marriages, even where they have little knowledge of the parties concerned, lost no time in communicating to his wife the news of Arthur Donnycourt's intended marriage. The effect of the announcement was unexpected and inexplicable to him. She looked at him for a moment with an almost frightened expression, and then turned away without a word. The crowing infant and the kindly host and hostess claimed his attention, and as they turned back towards the house, Sophy took up her share in the conversation. No one but himself had noticed anything strange in her manner.

This visit to Haverhill had been often urged by Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and Nathanael had planned it at the present time with special regard to Sophy's benefit. Ever since her recovery from the small-pox, she had been subject to fits of depression, that caused Nathanael much uneasiness.

He thought that perhaps she was brooding over the subject she had spoken of shortly before her illness, and he tried once to renew that conversation and to explain to her something of Baptist principles. She listened quietly, but said little, and at last broke into a fit of weeping that much distressed him, and he was glad to take counsel of Mercy who had not yet left them. Mercy could only agree with the explanation that Sophy gave herself of her variable moods, that

she had not yet fully recovered from the effects of her illness, and that her nerves were shaken and unduly susceptible to excitement.

After Mercy left, Sophy seemed to regain more self-control, but her bright vivacity was gone. Her former prettily imperious ways had forsaken her, and she seemed nervously fearful of the least shade of disagreement. She clung to her husband with intense affection, but in a manner that was almost painful to him. It seemed almost as though she feared she had lost her hold on his affection.

Nathanael was sadly shocked at first by the sight of the ravages the disease had made, but as her strength returned he scarcely thought of the lost beauty. Sophy was still Sophy to him, and his main desire was to see her health restored. If the same bright, loving spirit shone out from her eyes and spoke in the tones of her voice, his happiness was complete. The change in her spirits was a sore trial to him; and he had urged this visit to Mrs. Smith and in a busy season he had himself taken her and Penelope to Haverhill, with the hope of seeing her brightened and cheered in the pleasant society of their good friends.

As he watched Sophy chatting gaily with Mrs. Smith and chirping to the little Hezekiah while dancing him in her arms, he inwardly congratulated

himself on the success of his scheme. Her reception of the news of Donnycourt's marriage puzzled him, but at the dinner-table she was unusually bright and lively, and before he left for his long and lonely ride back to Chelmsford she made a little remark to him which explained away his perplexity.

"I cannot say that I am pleased with the news you gave me," she said. "I know that Uncle Donnycourt wishes Arthur to marry an heiress, but he is not the man to be urged into any such match. I have always felt that a good wife whom he really loved would make him, and the reverse would mar him."

With this explanation Nathanael rode away content. While Sophy, angry with herself, indignant with Arthur, and miserable between hopes and fears for Mercy, was almost thankful that she had before her a week of absence from her husband's watchful care, during which she could compose and indite the letter which she felt she must send to Arthur.

She fervently hoped that no tidings of this rumor would reach Mercy, until an answer came direct from Arthur. When that arrived, she persistently assured herself, she would certainly be able to deny the report.

CHAPTER XXII.

JONATHAN LEARNS A PAINFUL SECRET.

JONATHAN PURSELL, in consequence of the new resolution that he had taken, became a more frequent visitor at the Fythe Farm. If it had been up-hill work trying to win Mercy's regard when as yet her affections centered wholly on her sister and her nephew, it was a still more difficult and delicate task to try to efface from her memory the handsome and gallant young captain. But Jonathan had now a double motive; he was thinking of her welfare as well as his own. He honestly believed that the connection with Donnycourt could bring her nothing but misery. Of course, the fact that Mercy could have been dazzled and bewitched into giving her regard to a person so unworthy of her was a shock to Jonathan's feeling of almost undue reverence for her. But his respect and affection stood the shock; and it awakened in him that feeling of tender protection, which is a surer safeguard of a woman's happiness in marriage than the most rapt and exalted adoration.

The question to be decided was whether Mercy could be won over to favor all his patient devotion, or

was she, as he sometimes feared, one of those women who, unwilling to own that they have been mistaken, cling to an unworthy object as helplessly as a trailing vine hangs about a dead tree.

She treated him with more friendliness than she had shown towards him in former days, and her interest in his work was unfailing. Her own education was of the simplest description, but she would lead him on to talk of the welfare of the College, the books added to its small library; the encouragement given to the President by that worthy scholar the Rev. John Ryland of Northampton, England, who in addition to other marks of interest sent word through the Rev. Morgan Edwards of his intention to pay five guineas yearly towards the support of the President. Any encouragement was grateful indeed to the zealous laborers who were working bravely against so much bitterness and unreasonable opposition.

"Mr. President wrote last February to Dr. Thomas Llewellyn of London, and he has great hopes that he may do much for us," said Jonathan one evening. Dorothy listened with grave attention, but the bitter disappointment, that was ever present to her mind made all conversation about the College painful to her. It was only Mercy who listened with hearty sympathy, and urged him on with questions and words of real interest.

"Why should there not be another lottery to raise funds for the College?" she asked.

"That has been spoken of, and I believe that Mr. President has mentioned the matter in a letter to Mr. Ryland; but though he wrote last May, he has not yet received any answer. If a good share of the tickets would be taken in England, we might even count on raising £2,000 by that means."

"What does Mr. President think of the probabilities?" asked Mercy.

"He hardly gives an opinion. I know that he likes not lotteries in the main, but the College of New Jersey was greatly aided by lotteries granted by the Courts of Connecticut and Pennsylvania and New Jersey; and we now are sorely in need of funds."

"The Lord will not allow his work to languish," said Dorothy in a tone that seemed meant to end the subject.

"That is true, Mistress Seaton," replied Jonathan; "but we cannot expect a blessing if we stand idly waiting."

"To what field do you look forward when your course of study here is ended?" asked Mercy.

It was not an easy question to answer, but it served the double purpose of turning the conversation from a subject painful to Dorothy and launching Jonathan in interested discourse on the various fields where

ministers were sorely needed, and where the spread of Baptist principles might be greatly advanced by young men who could in their own persons refute the charge frequently brought against the Baptists that their ministers were generally uneducated men.

"Such men as Dr. Stillman, Mr. Hezekiah Smith, Mr. John Gano, and our own Mr. President are pillars of the Baptist Churches, but there is plenty of work for less gifted men, and I do not doubt that the Master will have my work ready for me when I am prepared. The object of this College is not to send out a few bright and shining lights, but to raise the average," said Jonathan with a modest resolution, that made Mercy answer almost involuntarily:

"Whatever your work, be it great or small, you will do it with your whole heart, as unto the Lord, and you will not fail, Mr. Pursell."

These words were treasured in Jonathan's memory. They echoed in his ears, as he walked back to the town, and climbed the easy slope to the hill on which the College stood. He paused a moment to look over the beautiful prospect spread out before him, the town, and, beyond it, the bright waters of the Bay; the islands on its bosom, and the more distant hills and dales being veiled by the light haze of evening, through which the full moon hanging low in the horizon shone large and red.

"With her to aid me, what might I not attain to?" he murmured, then he turned and entered the building.

It was several days before Jonathan again found his way to the Fythe Farm, but when the time came he had already resolved to learn his fate from Mercy's lips. He did not mean to urge for a decided answer, but he wished at least for the encouragement he might gain, if she could be induced to promise him an answer after the lapse of a certain time.

It was a warm and sultry afternoon, and as he opened the little gate, he caught a glimpse of a light grey gown in a little arbor, which was almost entirely veiled with honeysuckles. He hesitated whether to turn toward it, or to go direct to the front door that stood open. But it was Mercy that he wanted to see and the opportunity was too good to be lost.

As he approached he saw that Mercy was reading a letter, but she looked up at the sound of his step and hastily attempted to crush the paper into her pocket. In her agitation she could not fold the large sheet, and recognizing Jonathan she seemed to change her mind, and letting it fall on the seat beside her, she advanced to meet him with a friendly though nervous greeting.

"Sister Dorothy is very poorly to-day with the headache," she said. "She is not able to leave her room, but you will come in and rest, it has been a hot and dusty walk."

"I interrupted you. Let me look at the flowers, while you finish your reading," said Jonathan, with the courtesy of a simple kindly nature, but with bitter jealousy and pain in his heart. He had caught sight of the addressed side of the large sheet and he felt sure that it was a foreign letter. It was not hard to guess who was Mercy's correspondent, although he was not familiar with the heavy masculine handwriting.

"No, no," said Mercy, flushing, but recovering her composure. "I have already finished my letter; and indeed I have been desirous to have your advice. Perhaps you will find it cooler if we sit here and talk."

As she spoke she turned back to the seat she had just quitted; and now with steady hands she quickly folded the letter and slipped it into her pocket. But all her self-control could not conceal the traces of tears about her eyes, and the pallor of her cheeks as the momentary flush faded.

The conviction that Donnycourt had presumed to write to her, and the equally strong conviction that this letter had distressed her, and that any talk about her sister's indisposition, or any matter on which she might request his advice would be but a blind to conceal the real cause of her uneasiness, dispelled all ideas of prudence and caution from Jonathan's mind.

If he had been sent to take the proposed turn among the flower bushes, he might have had time to weigh and to choose his words; as it was he simply acted on the impulse of the moment, and Mercy had hardly seated herself and motioned him to the place beside her, when he found himself pouring out to her his whole heart, all his hopes, his fears, his longings. All stammering and hesitation were at an end. He spoke with the eagerness and simple eloquence of a man who is thoroughly true and unselfish and thoroughly in earnest. Mercy sat at first in bewildered silence, but as the full import of what he was saying, what he was offering to her, broke upon her, her face changed, a flood of crimson mounted to her very brow, her eyes grew dark and indignant, with an expression that Jonathan had never dreamed of, for even if she refused him, he had felt certain that she would do it gently, kindly.

"Oh how could you dare!" she gasped; "to me, a married woman?" and then as the full perception of her strange position forced itself upon her, she turned her face away and burst into tears.

Jonathan sat for a moment perfectly still, then he rose and stepped outside the arbor. It was an almost involuntary movement to get more air; for, under this cruel shock, even the light vines seemed a smothering wall around him. Mercy, however, was roused by the

movement to a sense of her folly, and to the consciousness that she had betrayed herself.

"Mr. Pursell," she exclaimed in eager, agitated tones; "one moment, I beg of you!"

He turned at once, and she was half frightened by the change in his face.

"May I ask," he said, "why this has been kept a secret from me? For you must know that I was in complete ignorance up to this moment."

"I do know," cried Mercy. "Forgive my hasty words. I was so shocked, so startled. Oh, I ought not to have told you!"

Before, Jonathan was grievously hurt; but now Mercy's last words roused a feeling of indignant alarm.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked sharply. "Does your sister approve of such concealment?"

Mercy shook her head, again weeping bitterly.

"She knows nothing of it. No one knows. He bade me to say nothing, till he came back to claim me," she said in a low half stifled voice.

For a moment Jonathan was tempted to turn away in wrath. Deception was totally abhorrent to his honest nature. But the thought that Mercy had no adviser and was completely in the power of a designing villain, as he now mentally dubbed Arthur Donnycourt, made him pause.

"Do you not see that this is utterly wrong?" he said, at last, in a tone that he tried to make gentle though suppressed feeling made it sound harsh even to his own ears.

"Do not be angry with me," said Mercy checking her sobs with a great effort to speak coherently. "If you will tell no one of my foolish words, all will soon come right. He tells me in this letter that he will soon return, and that he will write and explain all to my brother."

"I cannot help to carry on such a deception," said Jonathan, "you must see that—" here he paused, for the very name by which he was going to address her was not hers now, and he could not bring himself to say Mrs. Donnycourt.

"You can at least keep silence," replied Mercy flushing hotly, as she divined the reason of his abrupt pause.

"I cannot imagine how you could have been persuaded to such a step," said Jonathan, not heeding her words, and pacing restlessly to and fro before the little arbor, as he tried to grasp all the consequences that might follow upon his silence or his speech.

"It was so hurried. He came to say good-bye, and had barely half an hour to talk with me. Indeed the words were said and he was gone, almost before I understood what it meant," said Mercy wearily.

"Without any preparation—without any witnesses? What insanity could have prompted him? and he left you directly?" asked Jonathan, stopping short in amazement. "What minister could have consented to perform such a marriage?"

"I do not know who the minister was. I never saw him before," replied Mercy, answering the last question vaguely; "and if he had not been forced to leave me so suddenly, he never would have asked for such a hasty marriage," she added, with a little flush of pride.

Jonathan saw that she was made cautious now, and would probably refuse to answer more questions. He had however gained a new light on the matter.

As he stood crunching the gravel under his feet and knitting his brows, he mentally decided that this hasty ceremony had doubtless been a mere farce. He saw that it would not do to suggest such a thought to Mercy. So the result of his rapid thinking was that he would do well to keep silence. He feared that Dorothy in her present mood would be very hard on Mercy; and if Donnycourt were really on his way back, harshness and severity at home might drive Mercy to fly at once to him, as her natural refuge, when he arrived.

The main thing now was to keep her safe and contented at home, and to get hold of the young captain,

and obtain from him an explanation of the whole tangled business. Then if, as Jonathan fervently hoped, the ceremony proved to be as worthless as it was hasty, there would be at least the satisfaction of seeing Mercy freed from the toils of an unprincipled fellow.

After he had thus summed up the matter in his own mind, he took his decision.

"I cannot promise to keep this matter a secret," he said; "but I can and will promise to say nothing without first warning you, if you will promise me that you will have nothing to do with that—with him, until he has honestly and honorably explained himself to your brother and sister."

Mercy was watching him with intense anxiety; and now as his eyes met hers frankly and fully, she saw no trace of anger, but only an earnest desire to act truthfully and to help her, such as might have actuated him, had he been her brother. She dropped her own eyes and thought for a moment; then she said in a low but resolute voice:

"I promise."

"Then, good-bye," he said, as he stooped to pick up his hat, that lay on the ground, where he had dropped it in his excitement.

"I will not ask you not to think ill of me," said Mercy with a slight quiver of her lip. "I cannot

justify myself to my own conscience. But you will not desert Dorothy, she looks so much to you in her trouble; and if we needed help about Reuben, she always said that you were the one to whom she could turn."

"She is right," replied Jonathan with decision. "You are my friends; and whenever I can help you, I will—if you will let me."

The last words were spoken with an emphasis that conveyed to Mercy their meaning plainly enough. She only answered:

"I shall keep my promise."

Then he bowed and went down the gravel path, and she heard the little gate click behind him.

A bee droned heavily in and out among the honeysuckles, and a sunbeam flickered through the leafy screen and fell across the hands that were folded in her lap. Mercy noted every little trivial thing, as she sat looking straight before her, with sad, wide open eyes, that seemed too weary for tears now.

"Oh, Arthur," she murmured, "if you had only not left me! Oh, if I had a brother like this to help me, to advise me!"

She hastily drew out the letter from her pocket, and looked eagerly at its pages. It was longer than any that she had received from Donnycourt before, but it seemed like a language from a strange land.

All that he wrote of was so different from her quiet simple life; and the tone was gay and flippant, not like the Arthur she had known.

Even the announcement that he was coming to claim her, only gave her a painful feeling of the gap that there would be between her present and her future life. She tried to feel happiness, but she only felt dread.

Over there in England how could she deport herself, how would she appear to him and to his friends, and what would she herself become? If he would only settle here, in Providence, she told herself, all would be right.

But it is an unalterable fact, that a husband cannot be chosen, like window curtains, to suit with certain surroundings; he must be there, however the surroundings change.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISTRESS SOPHY'S SPINNING-WHEEL SEIZED.

SOPHY'S letter had been written with much care and thought, and, as she knew nothing about the sailing of vessels from Boston, she decided to entrust it to the hands of Mr. Smith, who expected shortly to start on another tour southward.

It would excite no surprise in his mind that she should write to congratulate her cousin on his approaching marriage, and in view of the possibility that the letter might fall into the wrong hands she had avoided all mention of names, and had signed it with the fictitious name, that, according to the fashion of the day, she had chosen to make use of in her correspondence with young friends before she left England. Arthur had been at one time furnished with the key to these names, and she did not doubt that he would remember who wrote over the signature Cordelia.

With the exception of this incident, her visit to Haverhill was both a pleasure and a benefit to her; and Mr. Smith's tact enabled him to speak to her upon religious subjects without either exciting her overwrought nerves, or driving her into the half-defiant

reserve with which she had met the hopes and prayers that her bodily illness might be blessed to her spiritual welfare from some of their well-meaning neighbors at Chelmsford.

She returned home cheered and strengthened, and the change in her spirits reacted upon Nathanael. He had made up his mind during her absence that he would unflinchingly stand by his principles. When he read or heard repeated the stirring words with which Mr. Samuel Adams and his colleagues in Boston were battling for political freedom, his conscience pricked him sorely that he should hesitate about boldly taking his stand for religious freedom. He found to his great chagrin that he had delayed too long to be able to avail himself of the certificates this year. They had to be given in by the first of June, and that time was already past.

Sophy had returned home with the strong determination to brighten the house for her husband, and when she saw him depressed and troubled, she immediately tried to win from him the cause of his trouble. In his relief at seeing her no longer brooding over her own ills and again interested in outside matters, he told her the whole story, remarking at the end:

"You see it is too late to do anything this year; and I feel ashamed of myself for my delay."

"No, it is not too late!" exclaimed Sophy, with a

flash of her old spirit. "I have heard Mr. Smith speak on this matter. Why should you be forced to give certificates? It is merely another form of injustice. These assessors of taxes say 'either we will extort your money, or else we will extort a certificate.' I would say plainly, you have no right to ask the one or the other, and you shall have neither."

Though he shook his head doubtfully, this bold speech found an echo in Nathanael's heart, and he looked with pride at his wife's face, lit up with enthusiasm. He did not at once assent to the bold measure that she proposed, but when the assessment was made for the support of the State minister, his dues remained unpaid. No notice was taken of this delinquency at first, and Sophy began to think with perhaps secret disappointment that her resolve had little of the heroic in it when it came to be put into practice.

The long hot summer days were over and the wintry winds were again whistling shrilly about the little farm-house, and roaring in the wide chimney with a noise like the sea at Marblehead, when tidings came that took Nathanael in hot haste to Boston.

The Committee of Correspondence had been formed, and while Governor Hutchinson was writing to the King: "Their scheme of keeping up a correspondence through the Province is such a foolish one that it must necessarily make them ridiculous;" all the

towns in the Province were hastening to assure Boston of their co-operation in an inflexible stand against the unjust exercise of authority and the oppressive taxes meted out to the Colonies by the mother country.

All these public matters were becoming closely personal to the little family at Chelmsford, for the affair of the Gaspee was now known to Nathanael; and although no direct information in words had been conveyed to him, he had little difficulty in guessing who were the leading spirits.

Two months before this event the King had made it a death penalty for any one to destroy so much as an oar of a cutter, or the head of a cask belonging to the British fleet, and also had decreed that such offenders might be brought up for trial in any county in Great Britain. The men engaged in the burning of the Gaspee had not been discovered, nevertheless a message came with the December snows both to Boston and to Governor Wanton of Rhode Island, directing that the offenders were to be sent to England for trial, and the blood of the sturdy and independent colonists rose to fever heat.

A letter was sent to Mr. Samuel Adams from four of the leading men of Boston, Deputy-Governor Sessions, Chief Justice Hopkins, Mr. John Cole, and Mr. Moses Brown, brother to Mr. John Brown, to ask his advice; and Nathanael too much excited over

the danger to his friends to remain quietly at home, hastened to Boston to obtain the latest news. He was detained by storm and snow, and the eventful year 1773 had been rung in before he returned home.

As he entered the well-known kitchen and met Sophy and Penelope looking bright and happy over his return, he did not at first notice any change in the room; but soon his glance fell on the corner where Sophy's flax-wheel usually stood. It was not there, and Sophy following his glance with eyes glowing with quiet resolution, answered before he could speak.

"Yes, it is gone. I told the collector that you would not pay a tax that he had no right to levy. Douglas Folinsbee tried to persuade me to pay. But I said, that when the people of Massachusetts Province were content to sit down every evening to their dish of taxed tea from the East India Company then they might come and ask us to support and to hearken to a minister, neither of our church, nor our choosing."

The loss of the spinning-wheel was a light matter to the frugal little household, but before the month of January was ended much more serious trouble had befallen others of their Society. Three of the Baptists had been taken to prison at Concord for unpaid taxes, even though they had given in certificates. One of the number was over eighty years old, and it was a very cold season.

Sophy was hotly indignant, but Nathanael was too much absorbed in anxious thought for the future, to show much outward heat and excitement. By dint of hard work, careful management, and scrupulous economy, they were doing well on the little farm; but the stormy aspect of both the religious and the political horizon caused Nathanael to question whether he had acted wisely in settling in Massachusetts. He broached this subject one evening to Sophy.

"Surely," she answered with a little burst of pride, "we are not to be frightened from our home by such measures. I do not imagine that they will put you in prison; and I will spin my flax on Elspeth Folinsbee's wheel, till you can buy me another flax-wheel."

Nathanael smiled rather sadly at her eagerness, but he answered thoughtfully:

"If I could only have foreseen the way that Dorothy and Mercy would be left, I should have acted differently. I thought Reuben would be growing up to manage the farm and to take care of them, but now they are left without any one there on whom they can depend."

"Dorothy always took the most of the management into her own hands," replied Sophy; "I doubt if she would willingly lay aside her authority, even for Reuben to take her place."

"True, true," replied Nathanael; "and therein, as

I read it, lay the core of all the trouble about Reuben. But it is different now. From what Mercy writes, I fear that Dorothy is greatly broken in health."

"It is very strange that we can learn nothing of Reuben," said Sophy. "It is now nigh upon three months over a year since he went away. Surely he would have sent word or have returned himself before this, if he had gone on a voyage to the Indies, as Mr. Brown supposed. He was a bright and personable lad, that any mother might be proud of. My heart aches for poor Dorothy."

They turned off to discuss again the sad and mysterious subject, on which no amount of discourse could throw any more light; and nothing more was said about their own affairs.

Mr. Backus had been chosen as agent by the Association in place of Mr. Davis, whose failing health had obliged him to give up work, and he was doing all that he could for his oppressed brethren. Many advocated strongly a vigorous stand and a refusal to give in certificates; but the way looked very dark before the Baptists. Everything was tending to increase the distrust which the colonies felt for the mother country; yet it was from the mother country that the Ashfield Baptists had received protection. The Baptists, however, were not swayed merely by self-interest. They strove to act from fixed principles.

They were firm believers both in political freedom and in religious liberty. Some of the people of Massachusetts were lovers of political freedom and protested against taxation of the colonies by the British Government, while at the same time they denied religious liberty to the Baptists, compelling them to pay taxes for the support of churches with which they had no connection, and could not have because of conscientious religious scruples. But the Baptists would manfully and logically stick to both their principles, whatever might be the result to themselves, though they did not deem themselves bound to remain where religious freedom was denied to them.

Therefore after looking calmly and bravely at the whole situation, Nathanael became every day more anxious to see his family back in the comparative freedom of Providence and Rhode Island.

If Sophy and Penelope were in safety, he felt that he could brave any storms for himself with unyielding courage. Sophy also felt that if she could openly stand by her husband and share all the evils that might be in store for the persecuted Baptists, she could bear anything with calmness, but she had never renewed the suggestion that she had made in such a singular manner one evening before her illness began. A good deal of knowledge had, since then, been silently penetrating her heart and mind. She had

now a clearer perception of what was necessary to enable her to become a member of a Baptist church; but however she might think or feel, she was always met by the consciousness that she had acted wrongly with regard to Mercy and Donnycourt.

"When that is cleared up and I can tell Nathanael everything, then I can talk with him on this other subject," she would say to herself as she restlessly tried to frame excuses for her conduct.

She did not yet know the result of her tardy resolution to refuse her countenance to Mercy's farewell meeting with her lover. During her illness Mercy, of course, avoided the subject, and afterwards by tacit consent they never alluded to Donnycourt. Had Sophy known what Mercy had told to Jonathan Pursell, sheer horror and dismay would have forced her to confess all to her husband and seek his counsel, when he told her of the rumor concerning Arthur's approaching marriage. As it was she held her peace and the slight jar in the harmony between herself and her husband became an established part of the household music. He did not know exactly what string needed tuning, and she, fearing that it might snap in the tuning, preferred the slight discord, and tried to atone for it by clinging even more closely to him.

The March winds had nearly ceased their wild pranks and the April showers were at hand when a

letter came from Mercy. Sophy took it from the bearer who had kept his word to deliver it in person. The sun stealing in through the kitchen window had nearly touched the noon mark on the floor. Everything was ready for their simple dinner, but Nathanael had not yet come in so Sophy broke the seal and seated herself to read the large, hastily written sheet. Her brow contracted and an expression of anxiety and pity was plainly marked on her face when Nathanael came in and at once asked:

"What ails you, sweetheart? You look as if that large sheet contained ill news."

"Truly it does," replied Sophy. "It is from Mercy, and she writes that Dorothy is entirely laid up. Severe rheumatism has grievously tormented her, during these cold and wintry months, and now she is so weak and overworn, that Mercy is sorely beset and hardly knows which way to turn."

Nathanael took the letter from her hand and read it through, then he stood pondering for awhile before he spoke.

"I see but one way," he said at last; "and doubtless you have already thought of it, little wife. You and Penelope must go to help Mercy."

"And you," cried Sophy, with anxious foreboding.

"I will follow you, when it is possible. Just now I cannot leave the spring work." He did not add that

the cases of the Chelmsford Baptists, who had been imprisoned for non-payment of taxes was coming up for trial in a few weeks, and he must be at hand to give all the testimony for them that he could.

"I cannot go and leave you," urged Sophy. "Who will take care of the house and make you comfortable?"

But Nathanael when he decided on a course had a quick mind to think out the necessary arrangements. He reminded Sophy that he could get old Nancy Carter to do the cooking for him and that Elspeth Folinsbee was near at hand. And then he spoke of all that Mercy had done for them during her illness.

"Yes," said Sophy with a sigh; "I know that you are right. But it is terribly hard for me to leave you just now, and in truth, I think, it is you they need rather than me."

"I will come as soon as I possibly can. But you will be the best help and comforter now, and you will send me word exactly how matters stand with them," replied Nathanael. "As to your going just now, I do not think that I should find it any easier to part with you at a more distant time."

He at once set to work to make all necessary arrangements for their journey, allowing no time to ponder over the loneliness in store for himself after they were gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PENELOPE ENCOUNTERS REUBEN.

NATHANAEL little guessed who was really to be the most efficient in carrying comfort to the sorely tried household at Fythe Farm. Sophy herself was prepared to carry to them loving sympathy, both honest and hearty. But underneath it lurked the old idea that always had such a charm for the quick-witted little matron. She was to be the helper, the confidante, the one to give advice and sympathy, and to draw them with her cheerful good sense out of the Slough of Despond. But they had not been long at the Fythe Farm before a close observer might have noted a different turn of affairs.

The usual kindly welcome had been given on their arrival to both mother and daughter. But in some way it happened that the demure little damsel was more in demand than her mother. Sophy, like many quick-witted people, often jumped at a conclusion, and then was as slow as the greatest dullard in noticing anything that did not uphold this conclusion; therefore she hardly remarked it when Mercy would come down-stairs, saying:

"May Penelope run up and sit with Dorothy for awhile? it cheers her to listen to the child's prattle."

Or if she herself had an errand in the town and Dorothy was resting she would ask:

"May Penelope come with me? she must not lose her roses. A walk will do her good."

The fact was that both the sisters had a feeling of restraint in intercourse with Sophy. Dorothy could not forget that she was Captain Donnycourt's cousin, and the one who had first thrown him in Reuben's way. While Mercy, though she knew that Sophy had too much delicacy and good-breeding to try to force her confidence, felt uncomfortable just because she dared not speak of Donnycourt, and she guessed that Sophy, if she said little, thought the more.

With Penelope it was different, Mercy was quite at ease and happy in the child's affection, which had grown to be very strong towards her aunt in the days of her mother's illness. Dorothy loved her because she remembered how much Reuben liked the quiet little puss, and when one day Reuben's name came unwittingly to her lips in their chat over former days, Penelope's childish affection for her old playmate completely won the sore heart of the poor mother, and she encouraged her to talk of him, so that Penelope was even led to confide to her Aunt Dorothy her dreams of how Reuben would come back rich and famous,

and they would all be proud of him. It was all great folly, Dorothy told herself, but it was soothing, and she relaxed as she never had before since the cruel blow had fallen on her. The child was simply fond of Reuben; she did not speak gently of him and pass over his faults for his mother's sake, as Dorothy always felt that older people did, nor could she understand the mother's disappointed hopes. Thus there was nothing to gall Dorothy's wounded pride, that was so quick to wince at every word or tone from kindly friends.

Sophy was not at all hurt by this preference. The two sisters, who had inherited the quiet self-control of their Puritan forefathers, could easily keep their feelings out of sight, especially as it never occurred to Sophy that she was not just the one best qualified to comfort and cheer them. Being naturally impulsive and out-spoken herself, she never even suspected the self-restraint that might be exercised by others.

Jonathan Pursell came in occasionally, but he was studying very hard, and as only a strong feeling of duty made it possible for him to continue his visits at all, he was relieved to find that the sisters were no longer alone. He felt that without unkindness he could devote himself entirely to his work, which was both his solace and his safeguard. Sophy decided in her own mind that he was becoming very grave and

unsocial, and that Donnycourt would feel no uneasiness from her foolish words if he could see him now.

But here again Penelope found a way to the heart, and her simple chatter soothed an ache which must be hidden from all open sympathy. Jonathan had on his first visit stopped to help her to pick a lilac branch that was high above her head and to say a few pleasant words; on another of his rare visits he actually loitered in the garden with little Pen, almost as long as he had sat with her elders in the house.

Penelope herself began to feel that she was of more importance than ever before, and as she was too honest and simple-minded to fall into conceit, it only had the effect of developing a naturally sympathetic and thoughtful nature, and she lived very happily through all the early spring days, as bright as the sunshine, and as sweet as the spring flowers.

It was nearly a year since the burning of the Gaspee, and though the flames that reddened the quiet June sky on that memorable night had long since faded out, the fire they had kindled blazed fiercely as ever in the breasts of the men sitting at Newport on the special Court that was appointed to inquire into the matter. The Commissioners had been rebuffed. They were told that any attempt to send colonists to England for trial would bring about a crisis. The people would not stand it. Indeed, every day was

curtailing the list of things which they would stand. The Marblehead fishermen when they held a grand meeting on their return from the Banks in the preceding autumn and expressed "their unavoidable disesteem and reluctant irreverence for the British Parliament," only fell in with the prevailing sentiment.

The child Penelope understood but little of all these matters, as she sat in the June sunlight, making whistles of dandelion stems. She had a favorite nook not very far from the house, but completely concealed from it by a dip in the hill-side and two or three large trees growing on the verge of what had been a quarry. Reuben used to take her down into the quarry, but Pen had a lurking fear that the undergrowth at the bottom might harbor snakes, so she sat under the trees on its margin and thought of her old playmate, while the sun sank slowly westward and threw the long shadows of the trees far up the hill-side.

A slight rustle of branches beneath caused Penelope to break off just as she had elicited a really satisfactory squeak from the dandelion bugle. She only thought of some rabbit or squirrel that was frightened from its lair in the underbrush, but when a tall gaunt figure with ill-fitting clothes hanging loosely on its bony frame slowly rose up before her, she was for a moment overpowered by the superstition of the time and only debated whether to scream, or run away.

"Penelope, have you quite forgotten me?" said a hoarse voice and the figure turning towards her a thin and deeply lined face, began to scramble nimbly to her side.

She gave up all idea of flight, for the voice, changed as it was, could belong to none but Reuben; and indeed it was he who in another second stood beside her.

"Tell me how they are, Pen. My mother, is she well, and Aunt Mercy, and all the rest? tell me, like a dear, good little soul."

There was an eager tone in the commonplace words that showed an intense longing for any scrap of home news; and Penelope began in her womanly little way to tell him of the health of each one. But she suddenly checked herself, saying:

"Come, Aunt Dorothy will never forgive me if I keep you away from her a minute longer. You must ask all the questions of herself."

"Did you say that she is no longer so grievously tormented with those rheumatic pains?" asked Reuben anxiously, without heeding that Penelope had risen, and was only waiting for him to accompany her to the house.

"Yes, she has tolerable ease of body," replied Penelope; "but it will give her the best ease of mind when she has you beside her again. You look sorely fagged, Reuben. You need food and rest. My

mother will scold me well, if I bring you not in to supper without more ado."

"Nay, nay, she will have no chance to scold, my little cousin, for I am not coming, and you must promise me not to mention that you have seen me," said Reuben, as he laid a detaining hand on her arm.

Penelope in distress and amazement pleaded and persuaded; but Reuben was not to be moved. At her first mention of his mother, Reuben was tempted to go with her. But the thought that his Aunt Sophy would see him in this worn and pitiful plight was more than he could brook. A sullen and obstinate expression darkened his face, and he only answered:

"When I can return to be of use to mother, you will see me fast enough. I have given her enough trouble, and I am not going to return like the prodigal, just because I have had miserable luck."

"I think the prodigal returned, because he felt that he had done wrong to go away," put in Penelope; "and perhaps, Reuben, it may be that you made a mistake in going away as you did. I don't mean that you are really like the prodigal; for you have not been living riotously, I am sure." She added this with quick apology, for Reuben was still her hero; and the fact that he had returned without the fame and wealth that they had pictured, made her the more eager to avoid anything like a shade of fault-finding.

"No, that I have not," replied Reuben bitterly; "but, mistake or no mistake, I chose my course, and I must abide by it. When I can bring back to my mother a son worth the welcoming, then she will see me. Till then, forget all about me."

"You know we cannot do that," said Penelope. "I think of you always; and now that I have Aunt Dorothy to talk to, I talk of you, too, very often."

"You are a dear little creature," said Reuben in a gentler tone; and then the sight of two big tears brimming over in Penelope's bright eyes softened him still more. And he set himself to comfort her with a tenderness and cheeriness that showed a brave and manly heart, whatever his faults might be.

Penelope had been taught not to cry at trifles, and she was now very much ashamed of her tears, and fearful lest they should lower her in Reuben's estimation. She therefore gulped them down as fast as she might, and made shift to show a brave front. But all persuasions and expostulations were unavailing. Reuben would not come home, and Penelope on her side was unyielding on one point. She would not promise to keep this meeting a secret.

"You never could be more worthy of a welcome than you are now," she stoutly averred. "It is you that Aunt Dorothy wants, not anything you may bring. And if you won't come, at least I must tell

her that I have seen you and that you are . . . . No, you do *not* look well."

"Oh, yes, I am very well," replied Reuben hastily. "Of course, a sailor just off a long voyage is not as fat as a young lazy-bones, who did nothing all day, and fed on the best of mother's and Aunt Mercy's cooking. Well, tell mother if you will, but no one else. Tell her I am going off again, so it will be of no use trying to hunt me up. Give her my dear love and duty, and tell her she shall be proud of me yet."

A rustle in the underbrush on the other side of the quarry was now heard and an impatient stamping.

"There, my little pony is getting restless. He has brought me a fine stretch to-day, and he must go farther yet before we sleep. So good-night, dear little cousin, and I must ask you to forget me."

"Even if I could during the day, I should always remember you when I say my prayers at night," said Penelope, still clinging to his hand with a very unhappy expression on the little face, that betokened, in spite of her best resolves, another flood of tears.

Reuben gently, but hastily, drew away his hand and plunged down into the underbrush. In another minute the soft thud of hoofs was heard on the grass, and Penelope caught a momentary glimpse of a galloping pony bearing its rider swiftly out of sight around the side of the hill.

"It was hard to leave her so abruptly," mused Reuben; "but I must make all the speed I can before she recovers herself and goes home. If I don't, I may be stopped. Mother might send to Mr. Brown or set Cudjo to chase me. I did not think that little Pen could have been so sturdily set in her own way. She meant right, and she is a good little soul, but I could not go home now. If my living has not been riotous, I fear me it has been far from righteous."

He seemed to take a sort of bitter pleasure in his own play upon words, but soon his face relaxed as he began again to weave the high hopes and good resolves that are seldom long crushed in the breast of a youth still in his teens.

He had rightly guessed that Penelope would not recover herself immediately. When she saw him disappear behind the hill she ran part way up the slope to try to get another glimpse of him, and to see at what point he regained the road. Of course it was wasted time; the pony went faster than she could go, and he was entirely out of sight. She could not even guess which course he followed, and the sun was already sunk below the hill-top. Brushing away the traces of her tears, she went homeward as quickly as possible, thinking over the strange meeting with feelings of joy and of sorrow.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. ROGERS HELPS TO REPAIR A WRONG.

PENELOPE'S news caused great excitement in the quiet little household. As Reuben had imagined, Cudjo was sent in haste with a note to inform their kind friend, Mr. Brown, of the clue to the fugitive, and to ask his advice and assistance. But this gentleman was from home. In their eagerness they had forgotten that he rarely slept at home since the Gaspee affair had caused the danger of arrest to be ever hanging over him.

Cudjo had been strictly ordered to give the letter into Mr. John Brown's own hand; he, therefore, as he did not find him, brought the missive back again. Thus by little and unavoidable delays all chance of catching up with Reuben slipped away. Inquiries were made the following day by Jonathan Pursell, to whom Dorothy next sent; but he could only learn that no one answering to Penelope's description of horse and man had put up in Providence; so that, doubtless, he had only passed through, or else had not even entered the town.

Jonathan advised that no great talk should be

made about the matter; and through his care and tact the story of Reuben did not again become town gossip. Thus Dorothy was left to draw all the comfort she could from Penelope's oft-repeated accounts of his words and looks, without being embittered by careless surmises and criticisms from thoughtless neighbors.

Meanwhile Nathanael was working steadily and persistently in his lonely home, but every day increased his dislike to keep his wife and daughter under the rule of the Province of Massachusetts as it stood in religious matters.

The Chelmsford cases dragged slowly along; nothing had yet been decided, when Sophy's letter came, telling her husband of the sudden re-appearance of Reuben, and his equally sudden disappearance. Whether he had gone to Boston, or to New York, or to some other port, they had no means of ascertaining; but Sophy asked Nathanael to make all possible inquiries in Boston, if his business took him thither. It was a bad time of year to be absent from his farm; and Sophy's letter having been delayed on the way, the chance that he could learn anything in Boston was so very slight, that he did not attempt to go there at once. As he learned that nothing could be done at present for his Chelmsford brethren, he was planning and working so as to be able to make

a visit to Rhode Island. It was no easy matter; but with the help of Douglas the earlier crops were got in, and before corn-cutting came on, he packed his saddle-bags; and, leaving the place in charge of Folinsbee, he started southward.

He stopped a night in Boston, but he could learn nothing concerning Reuben, though in the matter of politics he heard and saw much that greatly increased his uneasiness as to the future of the two women who seemed to be left so lonely and helpless.

"If Mercy were married, it would give them a protector," he mused as she rode slowly out of Boston on the following morning. "There is Jonathan Purseli, a likely young fellow, and greatly improved. I wonder that he does not strike her fancy. If it would do any good, I would speak to Sophy about it. But it is ill meddling in such matters," he concluded wisely, as he urged Black Bess to a quicker pace.

While he was thus on his journey, turning over matters in his mind, Mr. Rogers was alighting at the door of Douglas Folinsbee's house, and there inquiring what had become of the occupant of the Rodman farm; when he learned that Mr. Rodman had just started on a journey to Rhode Island, he looked rather nonplussed, then tightening the girth he mounted and rode off, muttering to himself:

"I am rightly served for meddling in what does

not concern me. 'Tis a hint to me to keep my fingers out of the pie."

He drew his horse and paused for a moment in indecision as he came to the high road; then striking his spurs into his horse's flanks he started at a brisk pace northward.

"I will not have my ride for nothing," he said. "I shall have time to go back to Boston around by way of Haverhill and to hear a sermon from Mr. Hezekiah Smith on Sunday. He seemed a mighty civil man when we met, and I think it likely he would give me a dinner. These Baptists are always in some trouble or other, and I should like to hear what their 'great man of Haverhill' has to say in their behalf. 'Tis well that I am not a parson, for I should prove recalcitrant, I fancy. I was really much taken with this Mr. Smith, and if he preaches as well as he practices, the men of this persuasion are certainly not as black as they are painted."

While Mr. Rogers galloped northward, Nathanael pursued his way southward, and Saturday evening found him comfortably in his old nook on the little porch at the Fythe Farm. Although he had come to see his family, Nathanael's mind was still greatly taken up with business, and Sophy even pouted a little at the numerous visits to friends in Providence and the long and private conversations with Mr. John Brown

and his brother. Nathanael only smiled indulgently and rather absent-mindedly at her complaints and protests. He was more than ever anxious to get rid of his farm at Chelmsford, and Mr. Nicholas Brown had heard of a possible tenant or purchaser.

The friend with whom he consulted strongly advised him to come back to Rhode Island, and to undertake the management of the Fythe Farm. It had been very carelessly managed since Dorothy's severe illness, and both for her sake and his own, the change was strongly recommended to him.

President Manning, to whom Nathanael spoke on the matter, was very cordial in his expressions of satisfaction at the prospect of a helper in church work.

The church had not greatly flourished, and Dr. Manning, who did not allow his collegiate duties to overshadow his interest in the welfare of the church that was under his pastoral care, hoped much from the assistance and co-operation of a man of Nathanael's character and energy.

"I trust," he said, "that we may ere long see your whole family united with us. Mrs. Rodman shows much interest in matters of religion, though her mind is not yet clear, I believe, on the point of a separation from the church of her parents. Your little Penelope is a child of unusual thought and intelligence, and better still I think she has really that

simple, childlike faith and love, which older people often attain to with such difficulty and after long and sorrowful grasping in the darkness of doubt or pride.'

"Penelope!" exclaimed Nathanael in surprise, "she is too young to understand such questions."

"She is old enough to have watched your conduct closely and to have listened to many conversations that perhaps you little thought she heeded," replied President Manning. "She has already spoken to her Aunt Mercy of her wish to unite with the church that her father has chosen, and while we refuse admission to unconscious babes, who have neither will nor understanding, we would not turn away the young disciple who comes to us asking to be permitted to follow in the footsteps of her Master."

Nathanael shook his head doubtfully, and only replied:

"I will inquire into this matter."

He feared that Penelope had been like her mother, simply excited and interested through the interest which he had felt in the Baptists, and by their persecutions that had been much discussed in her hearing. That she could quietly and simply accept the convictions that he had only won after hard battles with himself and earnest, anxious thought was more than he could understand. When he did speak to her it was not in such a manner as to draw out her con-

fidence, he rather repressed with a kindly but decided,

"Wait till you are older, my little maid, and you can understand what you are about."

It was approaching the end of August, and Nathanael was making preparations for his return home, when the news reached them of a terrible hurricane in Massachusetts, that had done great damage to the town of Haverhill.

Mrs. Smith had written of it in a letter to Mrs. Manning and after enumerating much injury to property, she added:

"Mr. Smith has just been called to the bedside of one who has been terribly injured by this fearful storm. He was struck from his horse by a falling tree and still lingers in great pain. The surgeon says his recovery is very doubtful; and if he does recover, it will be to a sadly crippled life. He was a stranger in these parts and was just entering the town as the storm swept through. His name is Rogers, and he sent a message to my husband praying him to come to him."

"That must have happened the very day that you arrived here," remarked Dr. Manning as he told Nathanael of the circumstance.

"Yes," replied Nathanael, "and God's mercy alone kept me from going to Haverhill on that day. Mr

Smith had pressed me to spend a few days with him, but my time was so short, that I wished to give all that I could spare to my wife and yon little damsel."

The hurricane and its results were talked over with great interest and many expressions of thankfulness that Mr. Smith and his family had escaped all personal injury. When the name of Rogers was mentioned, Mercy changed color so rapidly that it would have caused some comments, had not Sophy cried :

"I hope it is not the good doctor who came to me when I had the small-pox."

The name had not struck Nathanael and he quietly replied :

"I trust not ; the name is not an uncommon one."

The subject was thus dismissed, and a day or two after, Nathanael left for the north and thus just missed seeing Mr. Smith, who on the thirtieth of August, set out for Rhode Island Government to be present at the Commencement exercises of the College, and bearing with him a letter for Nathanael. It was the feeble writing of a dying man. Mr. Rogers had given it to Mr. Smith a few hours before he breathed his last, begging him to give it in person to Nathanael and on no account to trust it to any other hand.

On Mr. Smith's arrival in Providence, he at once sought out his old friends at the Fythe Farm, and expressed great regret that Nathanael was gone. In

speaking of the hurricane he mentioned the death of Mr. Rogers, and added that he had expressed earnest desire to have a letter conveyed to Nathanael.

Sophy's doubts were now removed, and she was sorely grieved to hear of the terrible death of this man, who had shown such kindness and humanity in coming to a small-pox stricken house.

Mercy, however, was absorbed in her own anxious forebodings. Now that she had to bear the additional anxiety of a long silence on the part of Arthur, she felt that any open avowal of her connection with him would be intolerable; and her anxiety and dread as to the contents of the letter, that in a few weeks at the utmost would reach Nathanael, threw her back into her former state of nervous excitement, while the heavy strain to preserve outward calmness was almost unendurable.

The mere sight of old Mother Truefitt was more than she could bear; as she pictured to herself the delight with which the old woman would enlarge upon the story of the clandestine marriage, if ever she got the faintest clue to it. Even Jonathan Pursell's visits, though she could not distrust him, caused her nervous dread.

It was while in this painful state that one evening in the early part of September she saw Dame Truefitt coming in at the gate. Sophy was on the porch,

so Mercy escaped up-stairs to the room where Dorothy was already lying on the bed. Though she was stronger, a very little exertion wearied her, and Mercy could not help seeing that the main-spring was shattered. The strong will and the patient hope that had supported her during the sad days after the death of her husband and her father were completely broken, now that the last prop to which she had clung so tenaciously had failed her.

Mercy spoke a few cheerful words to her sister, and then left the room, feeling too excited to preserve any calmness.

"How can I ever tell her? It would kill her to have any new blow fall on her while in this state," thought poor Mercy. "If I could have foreseen, I never would have consented to anything that would trouble her. Reuben's return will be the only medicine for her. Oh, if I had met him instead of that child Penelope! I would have forced him to come home with me."

Dame Truefitt was still talking to Sophy on the porch and Mercy went quietly down-stairs, hoping to find Penelope in the kitchen, for she wanted some one to talk to her and keep her from her own harassing thoughts. The front door was partly open, but she could pass it unobserved by those outside. As she came near it an exclamation from Sophy caught her

ear; she stopped and heard distinctly the next words of the Widow Truefitt. In a moment she had crept softly nearer, and was listening intently. Then without a word to those outside, she ran fleetly up the stairs again to her own room. With trembling hands she made a little packet of a few necessary articles, wrapped herself in a dark cloak and hood, and again slipped noiselessly down-stairs.

As she went out of the kitchen door she paused for a moment irresolutely, then she caught a glimpse of Penelope's slight figure coming out of the stable, where she often went in the evening to say good-night to Brindle, who was her special pet since she had learned to milk her. She went quickly to the child and, laying her hand on her shoulder, said in low tones:

"Tell them not to be alarmed, Pen. I am going now on urgent business. Tell your mother and Aunt Dorothy, as they value Reuben's life, to be careful and to keep silent. But, be heedful to say nothing before Mother Truefitt."

Before Penelope could make any reply, she was hurrying across the fields away from the high road.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MERCY STARTS IN QUEST OF REUBEN.

THE sun was still low on the eastern horizon the morning after Mercy's departure when a clatter of hoofs drew the two anxious women, who had spent the night in sleepless anxiety, to the door.

"It is Nathanael," cried Sophy in eager relief.

"The Lord be praised," ejaculated Dorothy.

Penelope had already run out bareheaded to greet her father. For the first time in her short life her father scarcely waited to greet her. He flung the bridle to old Cudjo who came hastening towards him, and strode into the house with angry eyes looking out dark and threatening under his contracted brows.

"Where is Mercy?" was his first abrupt question.

"We hoped that you had brought us news," began Sophy anxiously, while Dorothy looked at him in trembling silence that spoke more strongly than words.

Her evident weakness and unfitness to bear any great shock warned Nathanael to be cautious. She replied sadly in answer to his repeated question:

"We do not know."

He said not more but turned and went quickly out as if to attend to his horse. Sophy, of course, followed him.

"What is it?" she asked, frightened by his aspect of strongly repressed anger.

"Hush! she must not know just yet," he said, in low harsh tones. "Read that."

He held out to her a folded paper, but quick-witted Sophy, before she looked at it, said:

"Go in again to Dorothy. She will tell you all. You will make her question you, if you stay away now."

He saw the truth of this and reluctantly entered the house again, while Sophy stood in the red morning sunlight, and scanned the trembling lines written by Mr. Rogers on his death-bed.

He simply wrote that he had, in the preceding November, read the marriage service, uniting Arthur Donnycourt and Mercy Fythe, that he knew it was not legal, and had only consented to do it because his friend urged him and represented it to him as merely an expedient to avoid the chance of the young lady being forced into another and unwelcome match during his absence. Having heard that the young man was returning to the colonies, he thought it right to warn Mr. Rodman, so that no unfair advantage might be taken of the young lady's ignorance.

Sophy read the short letter through and stood for a few moments in blank dismay. She had not dreamed that matters had gone so far. Betwixt anger against Donnycourt, pitying dread for Mercy, and above all fear of her husband's displeasure, she was utterly confused and helpless. Penelope's voice at her elbow roused her:

"Father sent me to call you. He and Aunt Dorothy want you," said the child; and Sophy had to hide the letter in her pocket and strive to collect her thoughts as she went back to the low, wide kitchen.

"Nathanael thinks it is not so bad about Reuben," said Dorothy eagerly. "He has heard some talk about a young sailor being impressed on a British corvette and then deserting. He did not get the name. But he thinks it must be Reuben."

"Tell me exactly what Mother Truefitt said," interrupted Nathanael, addressing his wife.

"She said that Reuben had half murdered a shipmate in a drunken brawl, and was now in hiding down by Namquit Point," replied Sophy.

"Well, well," said Nathanael; "we all know what a lively imagination Widow Truefitt is blessed with. Keep a calm mind, Dorothy, till I have investigated the matter. This impressing of young lads for the British service will not be borne by an independent people. And if, as I believe, my story is the true

one, I give Reuben credit for his bravery and his skill in escaping."

His assured tone did even more than his words to soothe poor Dorothy's troubled spirit, and Nathanael was soon able, without exciting her suspicions, to call Sophy aside.

"You have read that letter?" he began in low and quick tones, and as Sophy nodded and drew it out of her pocket, he caught it impatiently, continuing: "The main thing now is to keep it from Dorothy. I must find out the truth about Mercy, whether *he* had any hand in her sudden departure."

"Oh no, that is impossible!" exclaimed Sophy aghast.

"Nothing is impossible," retorted her husband shortly. "I never could have believed that Mercy would thus deceive us all; but if she is under the influence of that fellow—" He stopped suddenly as if he feared to say too much, then added:

"I will go at once to Namquit Point; and if I find her with Reuben, all will be well. Meanwhile, little wife, I trust to your tact to keep Dorothy's mind at rest. It is a sad evil to have you mixed up with; but you are the only one I can trust to help me. If I once get them safely back home, no one must know this story. The villain was talking of marrying in England! If he ever comes within reach of my arm,

he shall rue the day that he dared to interfere with my mother's daughter!"

He kissed his wife's pale face, and went out quickly toward the stable. Evidently he had not the least suspicion that Sophy was in any way implicated in the courtship between Arthur and Mercy; and she herself was half relieved and half frightened as she became aware of this.

She was almost inclined to run out and confess to him herself, for Mercy would certainly betray her. But at that moment the sound of hoofs showed her that it was too late. She could only go in again to the usual daily routine, and bear the suspense as best she might. Dorothy was not in the kitchen; and on going upstairs to seek her, Sophy saw her in Reuben's room kneeling by his bed in earnest prayer. So absorbed was she that she did not hear Sophy's light footstep or the gently opened door. Sophy withdrew in silent awe. Then, for the first time, she thought of that refuge for herself; and hurrying to her own room she knelt and prayed eagerly, feverishly, that these dreaded calamities might be averted, and that her husband might not learn anything to shake his trust in her.

It was sunset before Nathanael returned to the Farm. Horse and rider were weary and jaded. A quick shake of the head and a hopeless gesture conveyed to Sophy that he had learned nothing of Mercy.

He told Dorothy that, from all he could gather, he was certain that his story about Reuben was the correct one. He had been in hiding at Namquit Point and last night had probably gone down the Bay in a fishing vessel. The man who had sheltered him could tell this much. But he did not even know the name of the vessel that he went on. The young man had left his house, saying "good-bye," soon after sundown, and had not returned; so he guessed he had got off all right. Nathanael said to Dorothy, that if Mercy had met and warned him, it was very likely that they had gone off together. At any rate, he would the next day go to Newport to make inquiries.

He went as he intended, but, while he was absent, a hastily penciled note from Mercy reached Dorothy. It merely said that she was caring for Reuben; that they had found a friend, and would return as soon as it was safe for Reuben to venture abroad. It bore no date, or address, and only the letter M. as signature.

"Mercy evidently was afraid lest it should fall into unfriendly hands," remarked Dorothy.

But Nathanael had other fears when he returned and saw it.

"Of Reuben and Mercy," he said to Sophy, "I found not the slightest trace, but I have learned that *he* was in Newport, and sailed for New York just before I arrived there."

CHAPTER XXVII.

NATHANAEL MEETS DONNYCOURT IN BOSTON.

THE wintry winds were driving through the crooked streets of Boston, laden with snow-flakes that drifted in eddying dance around the corners, nearly blinding the passer-by.

In a room at the barracks, two young officers, wearing the scarlet coat, were seated at a table, on which stood a pack of cards and a decanter of wine.

"A set of priggish malcontents, that is what they are; and they need a lesson from powder-horn and bullet-bag!" exclaimed the younger man hotly. "The sight of them drilling and manœuvring in every little village! Pah! What do they expect to do against troops, if it comes to that? And in good truth I wish it would come to that. We would give them a lesson that they would not forget in a hurry."

His companion smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Deane. We have hot work before us, or I am much mistaken," he replied. "This business of fighting the wilderness results in

forming a picked race. None but men of good muscles and sturdy temper could have stood what the first settlers stood; and their descendants are not to be despised. With forefathers and with training of that stamp, you may look for proper men."

"Yes, proper men and good Tories too, Donnycourt; I don't misdoubt it," said Deane. "For instance, your kinsman who lived at Chelmsford and was here inquiring for you a few months ago. Have you looked him up since you came back?" He looked anxiously at his comrade as he spoke.

"He! Oh, he's a rampant Son of Liberty," said Donnycourt, carelessly, as he poured out a glass of wine. He lifted it and then put it down, and, rising, walked to the window.

Arthur had changed in the two years that had elapsed since the day when he said his hasty farewell to Mercy. The tight-fitting uniform still displayed an elegant figure; and his whole attire, from the faultlessly powdered hair and ribbon-tied queue down to the buckles of his shoes, showed the exquisite dandy. But the handsome face betrayed lines of temper and of discontent; and just now, under all his assumed carelessness, he was annoyed and ill at ease.

Mercy's influence over him had certainly been such as to bring out the good points of his character, but away from her, the fascination that she exercised over

him waned. When he received Sophy's letter, taking him to task, he was annoyed; but the impression soon faded.

He did not really wish to marry the heiress whom his father had picked out for him. She was handsome and rich, but she showed no inclination to look up to Captain Donnycourt with a proper degree of reverence and adoration. He had an uncomfortable presentiment that if she were the mistress of his household, he might not infrequently have to exert himself too much, in order to have his own way. And on the whole Captain Donnycourt found no great difficulty in remaining faithful to the hasty and really not binding marriage into which he had beguiled poor, foolish Mercy.

When at length his brother made a very suitable match and re-instated himself in old Mr. Donnycourt's good graces, Arthur found his presence no longer desired. He had not sold his commission, and now thought seriously of effecting another transfer. After some delays and prudent use of friends and money, this was arranged, and he found himself again tossing on the waves of the Atlantic bound for the shores of North America.

The spell of Mercy's beauty and her unworldly simplicity now began to resume its old power over him. He felt that in his father's house he was either

courted or slighted from interested motives; and, conveniently forgetful of his own interested motives in returning thither at all, he contrasted the heartless manner in which his father and brother were ready to see him depart, with the welcome which, he was sure, awaited him from the gentle Mercy.

"Sweet little soul, it has been hard for her I doubt not; but I will make it all right now. All shall be done in proper style; my glum cousin Rodman's consent asked, pious Mistress Dorothy flattered and appeased, wedding-cake and favors all duly attended to. I was a fool to tangle myself up with that irregular marriage; but it was Sophy's fault. She angered me with her talk of that young parson. It may as well now be all forgotten; I'll tell Mercy not to bring it up."

When he landed he was confronted with a reality very different from his dreams. He was wise enough to make some inquiries before going to Providence to claim his bride; and thus he learned the story of Reuben's desertion. It did not suit him, just then, to mix himself up with any who had incurred the displeasure of the commanders, whether Montague or Gage. Thus although he was in Newport, he postponed his intended visit to Providence and sailed for New York. There a rumor reached him of Mercy's disappearance. He imagined at once that she had

learned the illegality of their marriage; and, angry and hurt, he made no further attempt to see her, or to communicate with the Rodmans.

Then came the eventful year of 1774, and more distinctly than before gaped the ever widening breach between the colonies and the mother country. The port of Boston was closed, and Gage sent there as governor. The first Congress assembled. The clarion voices of Adams in Massachusetts, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee in Virginia, rousing the colonies to band together in defence of their liberties, resounded through the land.

Washington's bold and stirring words in August, when he expressed a desire to "raise one thousand men, subsist them at his own expense and march at their head for the relief of Boston," showed the metal on which the colonists might depend if pushed by tyranny beyond all endurance.

Gage himself began to feel that he had a more arduous task than he could hope to accomplish. He could not assemble a council; for hardly any one could be found willing to incur the obloquy of accepting the position of councilman. Even when the people were most thoroughly roused there was an order and self-control evident in their meetings and their public acts, that boded ill for the success of any attempt at the subjugation of New England.

Arthur Donnycourt might well smile at the pompous talk of young Deane, fresh from England, where such strangely garbled accounts of the state of affairs were received, that Charles Fox was pityingly remarking, that "no people animated by what principle so ever can make a successful resistance to military discipline," and was "dejected and hurt from the sad figure that men make against soldiers," at the very time when, after the seizure by the British of the powder belonging to the province that was kept at Quarry Hill, Gage and his troops in Boston had lain on their arms all night with double guards and cannon at the entrance to the town, fearing the invasion of the armed and incensed multitude.

The colonists kept resolutely within bounds; and Gage, knowing that the whole country was full of roused and determined men, carefully avoided any stroke that might throw a spark on the tinder; because, as he wrote to the Ministry at home, "a check would be fatal," and "if the King would insist on reducing New England, a very respectable force should take the field."

It was little wonder that Gage's officers had no time to spend in idle amusements. Arthur Donnycourt, although he had more friends and more money at command than he had two years before, would have found it very difficult to obtain leave to go off in

search of his bride now, even had he been so inclined. In truth, he was so little pleased to hear that Nathanael had been seeking him, that it spoiled him as a companion on the evening when Deane told him of it, and he lay down that night with a firm resolution to do all in his power to avoid meeting his cousin's husband.

But, such is the futility of human resolutions, on the following day Captain Donnycourt was ordered on duty to Salem; and there, at a tavern where he was resting while his horse baited, Nathanael Rodman entered. The change in the elder man's face, as he recognized the young officer, boded him no good; but Donnycourt when fairly caught was not lacking in either bravery or address. He approached Nathanael with the ordinary civilities and inquiries for the welfare of Mistress Rodman and little Pen. In the presence of the loungers at the tavern Nathanael had no desire for a scene, and his accustomed self-control stood him in good stead. He replied coldly and turned away to address a friend who was seated near.

"There is something under this," thought Donnycourt uneasily as he proceeded to hide his discomfiture in the careful mixture of a hot toddy. Although Nathanael vouchsafed him no farther open notice, Donnycourt was uncomfortably conscious that he could not move without Nathanael's knowledge.

Whether he warmed himself before the blazing logs in the wide chimney place, or sipped his steaming toddy, or sauntered to the window to look out on the dazzling stretch of new fallen snow, Nathanael, without actually looking at him, always happened to be facing in such a direction that Donnycourt was within range of his eyes if he chose to direct them towards him. It was a decidedly uncomfortable position, and to end it Arthur hastily tossed off the last of his toddy and walked out of the house, intending to cut short his horse's meal and return to Boston.

The door had no sooner closed behind him upon the company within, than Nathanael's voice at his elbow said:

"One moment, sir. There are explanations due between you and me before we lose sight of each other."

The tone was so harsh and stern, that Arthur had involuntarily laid his hand on his sword hilt. Nathanael noted the act and his eyes flashed, while his hardly maintained self-control was on the point of breaking down, when a rider of handsome and commanding figure, mounted on a powerful horse galloped up to the inn doorway.

It seemed as if the keen glance of the new-comer had read the faces of the two men in one brief moment. He dismounted and flinging the bridle to

an hostler who came running from the stable yard, he advanced directly to Nathanael with outstretched hand and cordial greeting:

"My friend, you are the very man I am in search of. Your sister is with us at Haverhill, and only this morning I left her in the care of Mrs. Smith. She is very desirous to return home, but of course the weather has made it impossible. I imagine, however, that your business here is not too urgent for you to ride out to see her, and to receive the hearty welcome that ever awaits you at Haverhill."

The ministerial dress was not needed to enable Donnycourt to guess the identity of the speaker; for those who had once seen Mr. Hezekiah Smith were not likely to forget him. He had hailed the interruption as a chance of escape, but Nathanael forestalled that idea, and even while greeting Mr. Smith, he laid a detaining hand on Donnycourt's arm.

"Your pardon, sir," he said; "we will, if you please, finish our business before we part." And then, addressing Mr. Smith again, he said, "You could have brought me no more welcome tidings. I shall lose as little time as possible in availing myself of the information, and of the invitation you offer me."

During this year of anxiety and suspense Mr.

Smith had learned much of the state of things in the family at the Fythe Farm; and, though he had never spoken with Donnycourt before, he had little difficulty in divining who was the young officer, nor in understanding the tinder-like state of Nathanael's feelings.

"If you will permit," he said in his quiet courteous manner, "I would advise that you lose no time in seeing your sister, who is harassed with many anxieties concerning her nephew. And if I can be of use in relieving you of the settlement of business here, I hope you will command me. Captain Donnycourt, if I mistake not?" and he bowed to the young man.

Mr. Smith's personal influence was very strong, as many of his enemies had experienced, since that day in his early ministry, when an officer of the law, sent to warn him out of a town where he had come to preach, confused by his presence, stammeringly ejaculated:

"I warn you—off God's earth."

His friend now felt the power of that influence and reluctantly yielded.

Donnycourt, who had no inclination to enter on explanations to Nathanael in his present temper, welcomed the proposal with alacrity. He gracefully returned Mr. Smith's greeting, and remarking, "You, doubtless, desire private speech with Mr. Rodman. I

will await your convenience within," he turned back into the warmth and glow of the tavern.

There he was shortly joined by Mr. Smith and the two retired into a private room, but Nathanael did not at once set out for Haverhill. The advice of his friend and his own consciousness that he was too strongly excited to be sure of himself, caused him to abandon his intention of an interview with Donnycourt; but it was only on a promise from Mr. Smith that he would report to him immediately the result of his conversation with the officer, so that he might himself seek satisfaction, in case Mr. Smith received none, that he consented to withdraw to the house of a friend, at a short distance from the inn. Here he impatiently whiled away the time until Mr. Smith rejoined him.

"Well, what does he say for himself," he asked harshly.

Mr. Smith looked grave and troubled.

"I judge that the young man is weak rather than bad," he replied; "he attempts no extenuation of his conduct and he honestly owns that he acted wrongly and thoughtlessly. He says that he returned intending honorably to claim his bride, but hearing of her disappearance, and supposing that it was to avoid meeting with him that she had fled, he recklessly and madly abandoned all idea of pressing his suit."

"Acted thoughtlessly, did he?" exclaimed Nathanael angrily, "I should say that it required a good deal of thought to plan secret meetings with a young maiden, and to hoodwink all her relations and friends even to the point of a clandestine marriage."

"Nay, but you must do him at least justice," said Mr. Smith. "I would not defend his conduct, but as he says that he visited Mistress Mercy first with the full knowledge of her own sister, and afterwards at Chelmsford with the consent of Mrs. Rodman, he is not quite so much to blame as it might appear at first. The main thing that distresses me now is my firm conviction that a union such as this would be positively injurious to your sister's spiritual welfare; and I strongly doubt if it would bring her any happiness."

Nathanael was hardly following his friend as he spoke; his mind dwelt on the words, "with the consent of Mrs. Rodman." "Was it possible that Sophy, his loyal, true-hearted Sophy, had been helping to hoodwink him?" Then he found voice, and smothered the sickening doubt with the stern and loud assertion:

"Of course, Mercy can have no more to do with him. The fellow lies to clear himself. My wife had no knowledge of this affair."

There was a momentary silence, then Mr. Smith replied:

"I told the young man that he had no claim whatever upon Mistress Fythe. Now it will be your best plan to see your sister, and learn from herself what are her wishes. I think you will agree with me that she is not in a state to bear any additional anxieties; and that you will study carefully to approach this matter with gentleness and moderation."

He gained his object. For Nathanael's thoughts were turned into a different channel, and the question of Mrs. Rodman's knowledge or ignorance of the tangled skein of folly and wrong-doing was dropped.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MISTRESS SOPHY IN TROUBLE.

THE wind and snow were drifting keenly without, but a roaring fire blazing in the wide fireplace in the kitchen at the Fythe Farm sent out its genial glow and warmth upon the three figures drawn up around it.

In the straight-back arm-chair sat Dorothy older, thinner, and with her upright figure more bent than the tale of years would justify, but her face wore a peaceful expression, notwithstanding the lines of care. Opposite to her the firelight gleamed on bright ribbons and bits of color, where Mistress Sophy, graceful and dainty, notwithstanding her marred complexion, put out a little foot, cased in a high-heeled, buckled shoe, to the warmth; while Penelope sat curled up on a big grey wolf-skin that had been laid down before Dorothy's chair, to protect her feet from the cold draughts that sifted in through the cracks and crannies, and made the sanded boards of the bare floor cheerless comfort for rheumatic bones.

The wind and the fire made a strange roaring in the wide throat of the chimney, and at times the blaze

caught the soot at the back and a patch of bright sparks spread and crept upwards gradually disappearing and dying out in the black cavernous opening above. "Flocks of geese," Penelope had learned to call them, and she dreamily watched their appearing and disappearing, as she thought over the varied events of the old year that was this night drawing to its close.

Old Cudjo came in with a fresh armful of billets and piled on the lighter wood which crackled and sparkled merrily. Cudjo was now a hired hand. Mr. Moses Brown had set the example by manumitting his slaves the year before, and now the New England States had boldly taken their stand against this traffic in human beings, which Old England with strange infatuation strove to buckle upon the colonies, though it was abolished through the rest of her dominions, and any man who set foot on her insular soil was at once free, since slavery could not exist in Great Britain.

"Penelope," said Dorothy, "fetch the big Bible and find our evening Psalm. In this fresh blaze your young eyes can read without the aid of candle."

Penelope did as she was directed, and while she read the words of thanksgiving in the one hundred and third Psalm, Dorothy's head bowed lower, and her hands clasped tightly over a letter that lay in her lap.

It was Mercy's last letter written from Haverhill and in it she told them that she hoped soon to be home. She had not left them through all these long winter months without any word of her welfare; but her letters were few and very brief. She dared not write fully lest Reuben should be compromised if the letter fell into the wrong hands, and these unsatisfactory letters had rather increased than diminished Nathanael's anger and suspicion. Even in this letter she maintained the same reticence concerning Reuben, but a line or two gave to Dorothy hope and comfort. She wrote:

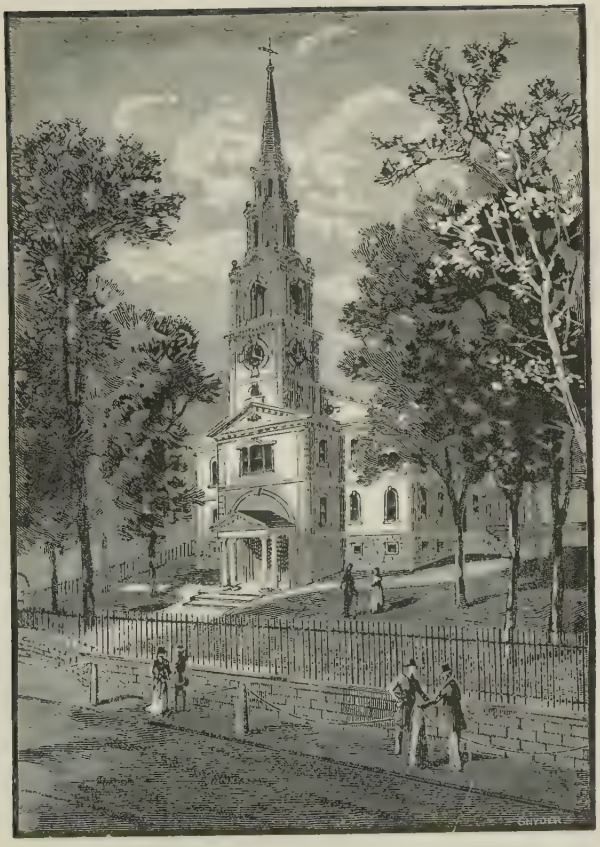
"My poor boy is but recently recovered from long and serious illness. Our merciful Father has blessed my unskilled care and has turned this grievous cross to the welfare of his soul; I can tell you more when I speak with you."

It was little; but it was enough to make Dorothy's heart rejoice. Sophy too was feeling a decided elation of spirits. She had tried diligently to fill Mercy's place to Dorothy. It was no easy matter to do this cheerfully, for Dorothy was sadly downcast. Nathanael had at once made arrangements to let the Chelmsford Farm and to live at the Fythe Farm, in order to superintend matters for his sister, but he had become so irritable and moody that he could by no means be depended on to make the household atmos-

phere more cheerful. Sophy, however, looked upon all these rubs and trials as in some degree an expiation of her conduct with regard to Donnycourt. Sophy had felt much interest in the revival of religion in the Providence Church, which had at length blessed Dr. Manning's earnest labors, and she tried earnestly to re-awaken Dorothy's interest. How much of the success was due to herself and how much to little Penelope, she did not stop to inquire; but the results were satisfactory. Dorothy's hard reserve had thawed, and now, with Mercy safe at home again, Sophy felt convinced that her husband would be freed from the wearing anxiety that alone could have so changed his usual kindly indulgent manner towards her. He had gone to Chelmsford ten days before, hoping to complete some arrangements for the sale of his farm, and they looked for his return shortly. With this good news of the hoped-for return of Mercy and Reuben to greet him, Sophy felt that the New Year, whatever clouds might overcast its political horizon, would begin brightly for their own little circle.

"It will seem a great change to Aunt Mercy to see that the old Meeting House is gone," said Penelope.

"Yes, indeed, and the new one so well on," replied Dorothy. "It will be one of the finest buildings in the colonies when it is completed. It was well done to put Mr. John Brown on as the committee of the



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building. Whatever he undertakes will be done, and well done, even if he has to do it with his own hands."

"It is a sad pity that she has missed the raising last August. I never saw a more general holiday and festivity," remarked Sophy; "but there will be, doubtless, very imposing ceremonies at the dedication in the spring."

"The best dedication to my mind is the right use of the building for the praise and the glory of God," replied Dorothy. "I have heard Mr. Smith say, that at Haverhill the new house was hardly raised when they had meeting in the frame, and I fancy the prayers and exhortations found as great favor in the sight of the Almighty, as if they had waited till prelatical ceremonies could be held to consecrate, as they call it, every beam and stone."

She was speaking with something of her old dogmatism and severity, but it did not last. Her tone soon changed and she added gently:

"Forgive me, Sister Sophy, if I spoke too shortly. My father had strong opinions on these matters, and he detested empty show of devotion."

Penelope now rose and carried the big Bible back to its place, and then curled herself again down upon the wolf-skin. She wanted to learn more about Reuben, but the conversation lagged and Penelope had

been too well trained to ask questions when she received no encouragement from her elders. She was sent to bed punctually at nine o'clock, but the two older women sat by the fireside waiting for the close of this strangely eventful old year.

As the clock struck twelve Dorothy bowed her head as in silent prayer, and then rising, kissed the younger companion on the forehead, saying in heartfelt, tremulous tones:

"God bless the New Year to thee, Sister Sophy. You and the little maid have given me wonderful comfort in the trials that are past. May he reward you with the light of his presence through all the coming year."

It was Dorothy's way of burying the last remnants of her hard and distrustful feelings towards Sophy; but the little matron, who had never divined these feelings, was impressed and troubled. She went to her room with a mind full of good resolutions, and fell asleep at peace with herself and all the world. Her only regret was that Nathanael was not there to welcome in with them the New Year.

Nathanael's return was in fact much delayed, but at this inclement season, that did not surprise them or render them uneasy. It was not until a fortnight had passed that Penelope, who kept a close watch on the road, espied the familiar figure mounted on a black

horse, and ran to announce to her mother and aunt that Black Bess was coming.

Another glance showed a muffled figure on a pillion behind him, and before many minutes had passed Mercy was in her sister's arms, while Sophy and Penelope were greeting Nathanael with loving hearts and eager questions.

"Mercy is, I doubt not, half-perished with the cold. Can you get a hot posset for her, Sophy. She would not hear of further delay, though the journey was a hard one for her, at this season."

The words were natural enough. But something in the tone alarmed Sophy. She felt that there was constraint in her husband's manner towards her, and for the first time it flashed upon her that he had probably asked a full explanation from Mercy of her meeting with Donnycourt. She had anticipated giving him the glad news of Mercy's intended return. Now she trembled and feared. A sudden cloud came down, shutting out all her bright visions of the future, and it was with a sadly troubled heart that she attended to the housewifely duties that had now so largely fallen to her share.

She was feverishly anxious for a few words in private with her husband, but he had gone out to the stable, and in a few minutes Penelope came running to her with the information that her father was

going into the town again. He soon followed her and confirmed her words.

"Mr. Smith sent Mercy part of the way in his chaise, and part of the way she had a ride in a carrier cart; but I borrowed the pillion for her to ride the last stretch, and I must return it," he said, and then added, "as I have some business with Mr. John Brown in Providence, I will attend to it all at once, and perhaps I shall stay with him over night, so do not wait for me."

With a hasty good-bye he was going out, but Sophy followed him with such anxiety in her face that he paused and waited for her to speak.

"Is the trouble about Reuben?" she said in low tones.

"No," he answered in the same tone, then suddenly he said to Penelope, who was standing by, "Run upstairs to your aunts, child," and as she went out of hearing, he continued: "I met Arthur Donnycourt."

"Oh, Nathanael! surely Mercy had not gone to him!"

"No," he replied emphatically. "Nor will she have any more to do with him. He, like the weak-spirited fellow that he is, tries to excuse himself by saying that he had your approval and countenance."

Nathanael was watching his wife keenly as he spoke. If he had hoped to see surprised and indig-

nant denial in her face, he was disappointed. The color mounted to her forehead as she answered:

"Indeed, Nathanael, he had not that; and he knows well that I took him severely to task. If I had dreamed that he would lead Mercy into such a step, I would never have allowed him to come near the place that afternoon. I have often, often, wished that you knew—indeed I would have told you all if I had not promised"—she was faltering and breaking into tears.

Nathanael only answered shortly:

"I suppose so. Well, that is all," and a cold gust of wind swept in as he opened the door and went out, closing it sharply behind him.

Sophy, through the mist of tears saw the big dark shadow of Black Bess pass the window, and that was the end of the home-coming that had been so joyfully anticipated. She was ready to sit down and cry bitterly, but the sound of voices on the stairs roused her. She must not show any traces of wounded feeling before Dorothy and Mercy. Of course, Nathanael was angry; but when he returned he would see that she had meant no harm. There was a terribly heavy weight at her heart, as she tried thus to comfort herself, for never before in all their married life, had she had occasion to say to herself that, of course Nathanael was angry with her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REUBEN RETURNS TO HIS MOTHER.

MERCY had borne up through the long cold journey more by force of will, than from physical ability. She continued for some time in such a state of exhaustion, that they learned only by slow degrees the full account of her wanderings during the months of her absence.

She had overheard Mother Truefitt's account of Reuben's misfortune and of the place where he was in hiding, and knowing that what Dame Truefitt could tell would soon be known to every one whom she could get to listen to her, Mercy took the sudden resolve to warn him. She met him as he was on his way to the boat in which he hoped to get to Newport, and on seeing his sorry plight and, above all, the reckless temper into which he had fallen, she made up her mind at once that she would not leave him. His protests were all useless, and she proved of great service to him in aiding him to avoid recognition.

He lay at Newport for a time concealed in the house of an old shipmate, who had carried on enough of smuggling to be well skilled in concealment, and who

had about his house nooks and corners that could conceal a man, as well as smuggled goods, if occasion required. Reuben's intention was to ship again on board a merchant vessel, but his strength was greatly impaired; and, as no favorable opportunity presented itself, Mercy succeeded in persuading him to abandon that idea for the present. But he grew very impatient of restraint, and at length his friend found a vessel sailing northward in which they sailed for Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

The voyage in the wintry season was dangerous and stormy. Reuben insisted on working his way, and when they landed he soon got employment in a place where he did not fear recognition, but he watched constantly for an opportunity to ship again for a long voyage. They were near enough to Haverhill for Reuben to feel the assurance that his aunt could soon reach friends. He therefore made no decided objection to her quiet resolve to remain with him.

It was something new to the poor boy, after all these months of knocking about, to have some one near who cared for him and eagerly watched for his coming. As for Mercy, the feeling that she was doing him some good was quite enough to nerve her to bear any trials. At times the thought that she had cut herself off from news from home and also from Donnycourt was very painful. She hoped by degrees to

persuade Reuben to confide in their trusty friends at Haverhill and perhaps, through their assistance, to return home. Meanwhile she did all in her power to prevent him from making any ill-advised engagement for a long voyage.

At length, when her influence seemed on the wane, and she was sadly looking forward to a solitary return to her anxious sister, Reuben was seized with a low fever. Instead of yielding to the usual remedies, it seemed to grow worse, and to be gradually sapping his already overtaxed strength. Then came a time when his life was despaired of; but the crisis passed safely, and he began slowly to improve. When his strength was really returning, he made a promise to Mercy that if she would return by land, he would sail on some vessel for New York, and, stopping off either at Newport or New London, would make his way home.

In the present excited state of the country he had little to fear from informers; and he could no doubt have traveled safely through Massachusetts. It was little likely that the mild and vacillating Gage would thank any one who brought him this haggard young deserter to be tried, at the risk of still farther inflaming the people. He felt that they were already beyond the control of his "regulars," notwithstanding the lion-like boasts and promises that he sent across

the vast Atlantic to flatter the Royal ear. The question of money settled the matter of route for Reuben, who could work his way by sea, though he could not pay it by land. He might now be expected any day.

Of her meeting with Nathanael at Haverhill, Mercy said very little; and of Donnycourt, absolutely nothing. Poor disheartened Sophy stood too sorely in need of advice herself to feel inclined to offer it unasked. She could hardly comprehend how deeply Nathanael was wounded. Even had it been in a slighter matter, the fact that his wife, whom he had deemed as truthful and simple-hearted as little Penelope herself, should have been deceiving him, would have sorely shaken his high ideal of her; but that it should have been at the bidding of Donnycourt, whom he always despised, and that this gay young fop should have had the chance to act such a shabby part towards his sister, galled his pride inexpressibly.

He rode about the following day, on one pretext and another, until he got his tongue, as he supposed, well under control. But he found when he went home, that it was hard work to act and speak as usual; and above all, he dreaded any explanation from Sophy, which might lead him to speak words that he could never recall.

Finding that Reuben might possibly be in New-

port, he announced his intention of going to meet him, and that same afternoon he went away again.

When at length the weather-beaten face of the young sailor appeared at the door of the old kitchen, he was alone. Sophy could not trust her voice to ask any questions. But as soon as her joy at seeing her boy once more would allow other thoughts to intrude, Dorothy inquired for Nathanael.

"Did he go to Newport to meet me?" said Reuben. "Then we have missed each other. They were short-handed on the schooner and I had to go on with them to New York. I should have been several days sooner if I could have stopped at Newport. My uncle must have learned that the 'Betty' had gone on to New York, and he will soon be back."

That night Sophy shed very bitter tears. All her peaceful emotions and resolves in the beginning of the New Year had taken flight, and only an aching sense of misery and injustice remained. Even Mercy, who was the chief offender, was not, as she said to herself, suffering as she was. She had all the credit of having saved Reuben, and, as for Donnycourt, she evidently did not care about him.

Mercy, for her part, was fighting a hard battle. Mr. Smith had been keen enough to penetrate through the ardent protestations of Arthur Donnycourt. He divined that, however much the news of Mercy's

really heroic conduct in caring for her nephew and the knowledge that she was so near to him, might have stirred the embers of the young man's passion, it could be no very trustworthy affection that had lain dormant for two years, or betrayed only such feeble flickerings of life.

He impressed upon Nathanael the advisability of placing this strongly before Mercy, and then leaving her to make her own choice; assuring her at the same time that she was entirely free; that the marriage was not legally binding; and that, in case she desired the young man recalled to her side, the ceremony must be properly performed.

Mercy at once and utterly refused to have any further communication with him, and when on the following day a letter came for her in his handwriting, she returned it with a few lines requesting him to attempt no further correspondence with her. This, however, could not efface from her mind the deeply-rooted feeling of the last two years that she was really a married woman; and the freedom in which her brother and her friends rejoiced was to her mind much the same as that of a woman who has been separated from her husband.

She could not bring herself to speak on the subject to any one, and it was an intense relief to her to find that Dorothy had heard nothing of it. Jonathan

Pursell, whom she had dreaded meeting, was absent from Providence, supplying for a time a little newly formed Baptist Church in Massachusetts.

If she had not been haunted by the memory of the past, she would have rested and enjoyed the tender care of her sister and Sophy and little Pen; but, as it was, she felt that she dared not relax the stern vigilance that she kept up over herself, and as the result she pushed the strain too far, and soon after Reuben's return she broke down utterly.

For days her mind wandered in fevered fancies, and the intervals in which reason strove to resume her sway were haunted by the dread lest some delirious words had betrayed her secret to Dorothy. When the force of the fever abated Mercy's strength seemed crushed, and all her interest in life completely gone. She had hardly sufficient strength to note the events transpiring immediately around her.

The talk of train-bands and minute men drilling steadily and unceasingly, so as to be ready for action at a minute's notice, fell on unheeding ears. It was little to her that Gage's request for twenty thousand had been refused by the British Parliament, on the ground that a smaller number would be sufficient to quell the "rude rabble"; or that Chatham's earnest efforts to effect a reconciliation and to avert the impending civil war had proved utterly fruitless.

But the tide of events rolled on. Lord Chatham's bill for the repeal of offensive statutes and the renunciation of the right of taxation on the part of England, and requiring that America, on her side, should recognize the right of Parliament to regulate the commerce of the whole Empire, and should defray by free grants the expenses of her own governments, was rejected in the House of Lords by a vote of sixty-one to thirty-two. No wonder their obstinacy and willful blindness led Franklin to exclaim, "Hereditary legislators! there would be more propriety in having hereditary professors of mathematics!"

Meanwhile the preparation of military supplies was going on; militia troops were reviewed and every possible step was taken by the colonists to be in readiness for the coming shock, which they deprecated, but clearly foresaw. And while the mildest winter ever known in Boston was drawing to a close, Lord Howe and his brother were nearing the American shores, sent out from England, the former as pacificator, the latter to supersede the vacillating Gage, as head of the British troops in Boston.

Mercy, wrapped in her own sad thoughts, scarcely heeded such news as reached her ears. Had Arthur Donnycourt been content to accept her rebuff, and did he really mean nothing by all his protestations? From the man who had played upon her feelings and

imposed upon her credulity, she shrank with horror; from the man who had carelessly left her to endure two years of miserable concealment and disappointed expectation, she turned with contempt; but through all spoke the forgiving patience of a loving woman, suggesting how he might explain, how he might clear himself, or at least how he might nobly and honorably confess his faults and atone for them, if—there came the great point—he really cared for her.

But, truth to say, Donnycourt was first ashamed then angry, then relieved to find that he had been released from any entanglement. The relief he scarcely owned even to himself; he was the "unfortunate victim of circumstances"; "fate was against him;" for the gay young officer was fast drifting into the careless unbelief which was so prevalent at the time and which recognized nothing higher or lower than lucky or unlucky chance.

Meanwhile Jonathan Pursell was busied in his field of labor, diligently caring for a weak church and nurturing, with their religious belief, that strong regard for political justice and liberty which was characteristic of the Baptists in this troubled time. While thus engaged he learned of Mercy's illness and her despondency; and he found time to write a carefully worded appeal to Mrs. Manning, begging her to use her influence to rouse and soothe the sorely wounded

spirit of the sufferer. He could not even allude to what he knew to be the real cause of Mercy's grief; and he adopted the only way in which he could justify and explain his appeal to Mrs. Manning. It was hard for his pride and his sensitive nature, but he told her plainly of his deep love for Mercy and that, being debarred by her own already expressed desire from intruding himself upon her, his greatest happiness would now be in the assurance that she was regaining the health of body and the peace of mind which had been so severely strained by her recent anxieties. He inclosed the letter in one to Mr. Manning, and then steadily turned to his work again, following with his prayers the missive that had cost him so much thought and mental struggle.

He had, in truth, done the best thing for Mercy. She had asked to be excused from seeing any friends. Dorothy had gathered enough from the frequent recurrence of Donnycourt's name in her fevered incoherence, to be very tender and anxious to humor her. Sophy was wrapped up in her own anxieties; for Nathanael's manner to her had not once resumed its usual affectionate unrestraint; and, in truth, he had only been home twice for a few hours in the two months since Mercy's return.

It was only little Pen who was clear-sighted enough to see that Aunt Mercy was sadly changed, and to

wish that somebody wise and kind enough to do her good would come to talk with her and to comfort her.

Mrs. Manning read the letter, when her husband handed it to her, with womanly interest and sympathy.

It was only two months since she had herself united with the church, and her heart had been very deeply stirred. She remembered now that, while the meeting-house was thronged with eager and anxious listeners, and sometimes Mr. Manning was an hour in making his way from the pulpit to the door, kept back by anxious inquirers, Mercy Fythe was never seen in the meeting. Her illness was the excuse given; but now, after prayerful thought, Mrs. Manning decided to go that afternoon to the Fythe Farm, and to seek to discover from Mercy herself what it was that kept her back from full sympathy with the good work that was rejoicing the hearts of all the Lord's people.

The waves of the Bay were tossing under the gusty March winds, but a warm sun peeped through the flying clouds, and already woods and fields were awakening under the influence of the unusually early spring. Several times before she reached the Farm she doubted her ability to do any good.

"I have three times been told that Mercy was not strong enough to see me, or was trying to sleep;—and, even if I should see her, what can I say? I

shall probably sit for an hour chatting to Dorothy and to Mistress Rodman, and then return home after having wasted my afternoon."

Her doubts were soon set at rest, for Penelope opened the door and without any hesitation, at once led the way to the kitchen where Mercy sat listlessly at work over a mending basket. Sophy and Dorothy had gone out, and Penelope, rejoicing in her wise little heart that her aunt could not avoid meeting this kind friend, soon slipped way and left them together.

Instead of comments upon Mercy's health, Mrs. Manning soon turned the conversation on matters that had been absorbing the attention of her husband and herself, and before Mercy knew it she was listening with eagerness to the account of Dr. Manning's visit to Philadelphia the preceding autumn, and the efforts then made in behalf of the Baptists.

"I have heard little of church matters during the last few months," said Mercy, "but I heard Sophy say, that Nathanael did all he could to aid the members of the Chelmsford congregation who were taxed so unjustly two years ago."

"Ah, that was dropped," said Mrs. Manning. "One case came to trial and went in favor of the Baptists, but owing to some illegality in form they were obliged to pay part of the costs; and the other cases were not brought up at all. This had its share in

causing resolutions to be adopted at the next meeting of the Association to send in no more certificates, and to protest against the requiring of them. But I fear that Mr. John Adams spoke only too truly at the meeting in Carpenter's Hall, in Philadelphia, last October. That was when my husband presented the memorial in behalf of civil and religious freedom, in which the oppressions endured by Massachusetts' Baptists were recounted. Mr. Adams then said that 'they might as well turn the heavenly bodies out of their annual and diurnal courses as the people of Massachusetts at the present day from their Meeting House and Sunday laws.' Nothing satisfactory was obtained; but the right will surely prevail in the end."

"I cannot feel that," said Mercy wearily as she toyed with the balls of darning cotton in her basket. "I think that Satan gains more power."

"He gains more power over those who court him," said Mrs. Manning; "not over those who resist him."

"If after all our strongest resistance matters go worse and worse," said Mercy in low tones, "what can we think? If you tried hard to save one whom you loved, and even did wrong yourself to benefit the soul of another—yet the toils of the Evil One appeared only to fasten the closer—?" She stopped as if half afraid to go on lest she should say too much.

Mrs. Manning felt that she was groping blindly as

to the real cause of Mercy's trouble; but she answered steadily.

"If we offer the best resistance, we shall surely succeed. Our Captain leads his men, not to defeat, but to victory, as long as they follow him. But if we do *wrong* to benefit the soul of another, are we not cutting ourselves off from our Leader and trying, like straggling skirmishers, to fight single-handed against an overwhelming force?"

Mercy made no reply, and Mrs. Manning continued:

"Your question made me think of a remark that a young man, who had recently arrived from England, and was stopping with Mr. Nicholas Brown last autumn, made to my husband. He said that the Baptists ought in their own interests to try to heal the breaches between the colonies and the mother country, since it was to the King they looked for protection from their fellow Christians here. He added lightly, 'I suppose you would rather pay the four-penny tax on tea than the same tax on your religious privileges as, I take it, you now do in Massachusetts Province.' My husband replied that it was a matter of principle, not of individual interest; and that wrong-doing in secular matters would never establish right in matters of religion."

"But if the wrong is done and you have no means

of righting it?" asked Mercy in the same half unwilling tone, as she ran her needle in and out of the ball of darning cotton.

"We must do the best that lies in our power to avoid any other slip, we must hold more closely to the great Captain of our salvation," replied Mrs. Manning; "our life is a training; not a mere succession of spasmodic acts, some good, some bad. If at some point we have failed, it was because that point was ill guarded. We must watch and pray. If we sit repining with folded hands, the Evil One will surely discover another weak point, and make a fresh assault, while we are unprepared."

Mercy's answer was prevented by the entrance of Dorothy and Sophy, and the conversation became general. But as Mrs. Manning rose to take leave Mercy found a moment to say:

"I thank you kindly for your words. I have been sorely beset. At times it seemed that both heart and faith entirely failed me."

"Thus was it with the disciples on the Sea of Galilee when their blessed Lord was with them in the boat," said Mrs. Manning. "But remember, dear, that weakness of body has much to do with distress of mind. Your duty now is to gain strength and to work for the Master as you are able, without overmuch thought and questioning."

CHAPTER XXX.

MERCY COMFORTS SOPHY.

MRS. MANNING'S kind and judicious words left Mercy much food for thought, and the closing advice restrained her from giving way to her impulse to seek her own chamber to think over her shortcomings and weep over her mistakes. On the contrary, she remained in the kitchen and for the first time began to inquire with some show of interest how Dorothy and Sophy had passed the afternoon.

"We went to see Keziah Crane," replied Dorothy. "Her lame knee has kept her from many of the meetings this winter, and a little neighborly chat cheers her. Her niece, Waitstill, has received of this blessed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and truly I have never seen a more happy frame of mind than the young maiden manifests. She is to be baptized shortly with several others who have found peace in the blessed Saviour."

It struck Mercy, for the first time, that Sophy looked pale and harassed, and that the dark eyes, formerly so bright and merry, looked as though tears lay very near the surface. She thought also that

Dorothy always had a particular dislike for Keziah Crane, who was a shiftless housekeeper, and withal prone to talk much of her religious experience. As Dorothy once sharply expressed it:

"I would that her religion was less in her feelings and more in her fingers. I have no patience with people who have no capacity."

To have gone willingly to have a neighborly chat with Keziah showed a marked change in Dorothy, and Mercy recalled now how much more gentle and considerate her sister was than in former days.

She continued to talk and show interest in the news they brought, and even tried to help in preparing supper. This however was forbidden her, and indeed she was still too weak to be of any assistance in household work.

But Dorothy's grave face brightened as she saw her sister's return to life and interest in what surrounded her, and Sophy ventured upon little caresses in a timid, wistful manner, that did more than words to show Mercy how she had been selfishly shut up in her own trouble, heedless of their anxieties and their affection.

Indeed, something in Sophy's expression troubled her, and after she had gone up to her room she lay awake thinking over many things in the new light of an humble resolution to put away her own selfish

sorrow, and to seek comfort in doing the work that lay nearest to her.

The room occupied by Sophy was next to hers, and Mercy's ear caught a sound very like hushed crying. In Nathanael's absence, Penelope's little cot had been moved into Sophy's room, and, fearing that the little girl was ailing, Mercy got up and went to the door.

"Penelope," she called softly, "what is the matter, dear?"

To her surprise the door opened, and Sophy's figure, wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown, stood before her, faintly visible against the dim light from the window.

"Oh, how imprudent! Mercy, dear, you should not have left your bed," she exclaimed in low tones, that showed that Penelope was still asleep, and that she feared to waken her.

Mercy was so startled by the sudden conviction that it was Sophy who had been weeping, that she knew not what to say, and allowed herself to be led back to her own room in silence.

But as Sophy helped her into her bed again and arranged the pillows with tender solicitude, she caught her hands and whispered:

"Sophy, is it I who have caused you this sorrow? Oh, forgive me. I have been sadly and heedlessly

selfish. But the worst, I trust, is over now; and, God helping me, I will live better in future."

"No, no, sweetheart, do not blame yourself," said Sophy with an attempt at her usual bright cheerfulness; but it failed sadly. In another moment, as Mercy tried to draw her towards her, she buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

"It is all my own fault, my own perverse self-will," she said in half-smothered tones. "But that does not make it any easier. We were so happy before. All the troubles only came and went like flitting clouds. Now all is dark as night."

"Sophy," exclaimed Mercy, a sudden perception flashing on her mind, "does Nathanael know that you tried to persuade me not to go to Douglas Folinsbee's on that afternoon?"

"Oh, yes; I told him *that*," replied Sophy wearily with a slight emphasis on the last word, which showed very clearly that this last attempt at a stand availed as little in his estimation as it had in the actual course of events.

There was a pause, broken only by Sophy's long-drawn sobs, as she tried to check her tears. Mercy was much distressed; she could offer no advice or consolation, for she well knew how Sophy idolized Nathanael; and she herself stood in no little awe of her grave and resolute brother. She could only

pass her hand gently over the bowed head with its disheveled curls that lay on her pillow and whisper:

"God permits the trials, and he will bring the comfort."

"Yes, to you, Mercy, for you are his child. But not to me," moaned Sophy. "What have I ever done to serve him? I thought I was good and wise, but I am nothing but a castaway. I see it all now."

"Hush, hush, dear!" cried Mercy. "You meant no harm; it was only a mistake."

"Is it nothing to have called myself a Christian when I scarcely thought of Christ, to have come again and again to his table with thoughts wandering on trivial matters? Oh, it is dreadful to think how blind and conceited I have been!"

She lifted her head and flung back the hair from her face, with an impatient and almost despairing gesture.

"But, Sophy dear, if we have wandered, we must return, and cling closer to our Leader," said Mercy, the words of the conversation of the afternoon rising naturally to her lips. "He is merciful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"Yes, you can say that; but I have been always wrong. Even my baptism and my confirmation, which I supposed ensured my safety, were only disobedience

to his commands," answered Sophy. "And then to think of my proposal to join the Baptist Church! No wonder Nathanael was shocked."

"You did not understand, dear. You did not think how much more it means to us when we unite with the church," said Mercy who, although much startled at first, was now chiefly intent on soothing Sophy's passionate self-reproaches.

"No, no, do not try to deceive me," cried Sophy. "I ought to have known, and I ought to have thought. Of course, at my baptism, when my god-fathers and god-mothers promised for me, I knew nothing; but afterwards I took those vows upon myself; there is no excuse for me that I was so careless and heedless after that."

"But, sweetheart, you are thinking now, and our loving Saviour waits to pardon and receive those who truly seek him," replied Mercy. "He is gracious and full of compassion."

In her own heart she was wondering whether it was quite right to offer consolation yet; she knew that many said that long repentance should follow upon years of carelessness; and some indeed seemed to feel that the stability and the measure of grace accorded to a redeemed soul depended much upon the depth of despair and misery through which the light of the Divine Presence had been reached. This was

entirely contrary to Mercy's mild and gentle nature, and it was a great comfort to her that Dr. Manning's teachings were not of that stamp.

"Yes," replied Sophy; "I have heard that often at the meetings which I have been able to attend. But don't you see that is just what makes it so hard?"

"Why should it be hard to understand?" said Mercy, not clearly comprehending her meaning. "You do not find it hard to trust an earthly love, to believe that Nathanael loves you."

"It is not that," answered Sophy, and by this time she had checked her tears and spoke in a quieter voice, but with an inexpressibly dreary and hopeless ring in it. "I know that. But oh, can't you see, when I have been carelessly and thoughtlessly wrong all the time, how can I *ever* show that I love? Will Nathanael ever again believe that I love him?" She stopped suddenly with a break in her voice, but the pathetic intensity of the hopeless cry drove all doubt and fear from Mercy's mind.

"Of course he will," she exclaimed with emphatic and unhesitating decision, as she threw both arms about the little trembling figure beside her. "It is only a mist that will pass away. And, Sophy darling, there are no mists before God's sight. He sees us and our inmost thoughts more clearly than we see ourselves."

"Do you really think that?" asked Sophy, a faint tone of encouragement audible in her voice. "I do care very, very much, and ever since you came home I have been reading the Bible constantly to find out exactly what I ought to do. But I could find so little."

"Do you still think that the sprinkling of infants is the baptism that Jesus commanded?" asked Mercy.

"No, I cannot find that," replied Sophy.

"Then is not the command clear, 'Believe and be baptized?'" continued Mercy.

"Yes, but before that," said Sophy urgently; "what can I do? I could not just follow Nathanael to Haverhill, or wherever he is now, without having first done something to show him that I will never, *never* again do anything to vex him."

Poor Sophy's ardent, loving heart was stronger than her head, and seeing that, like a child, she grasped at heavenly things through her strongest earthly affection, Mercy answered quickly:

"Would you wait for that if he sent for you?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed Sophy, almost indignantly; then, as Mercy's meaning flashed upon her, she raised her head from the pillow in which she had hid it in her misery, and sat silently thinking.

Mercy who was willing to let her words take effect and who also began to feel her own weakness, let her-

self sink back against the pillows, and Sophy roused by the movement, exclaimed with compunction:

"You are weary. You ought to have been asleep long ere now. Even when I mean well, I do ill."

"Which of us can say otherwise," whispered Mercy sadly, but at the next moment she roused herself to give a kiss to the face bending anxiously over her.

Sophy understood the thought that lay beneath these words, and as she drew the curtains around Mercy's pillow and went softly back to her own room, a warm and loving sympathy had taken the place of her former misery. And Mercy, although undoubtedly exhausted by their talk, felt a peace to which she had long been a stranger.

Each of the two women laid her head on her pillow that night sympathizing in the trials and the failings of the other; and both were humbly drawing nearer to the one Friend, who is ever ready to help the faltering steps and to pour balm on bruised hearts.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FIRST GUN OF THE REVOLUTION.

THE work of grace that began in the town of Providence during that memorable winter, formed an epoch that would never be effaced from the minds of those who witnessed it. Dr. Manning's church was largely increased and, as he himself said, he had neither time, nor indeed inclination to attend to more than the most imperatively necessary secular matters. In the College the interest was very great. Often Dr. Manning would go to the recitation-room and find nearly all the students assembled there joining in prayer and praise to God; and he would be met with the request that, instead of the usual lecture on Philosophy, or on Logic, he would speak to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

In the course of about six months he baptized more than one hundred converts, and among that number, in the early days of spring, were Mistress Sophy Rodman and her daughter Penelope.

Shortly after the talk with Mercy, Sophy timidly expressed a desire to speak with Dr. Manning. The good pastor, after a long conversation with her, in

which he learned not only of her own faith and love, but also of Penelope's feelings and desires, urged strongly that they should both come forward for baptism.

Sophy with a natural desire to have her husband's approval and his presence at such an important step in her life, was inclined to delay until his return, but she owned that she did not know when to expect him, nor even exactly where a letter would reach him. In view of the alarming state of public affairs, and the generally unsettled condition of the country, Dr. Manning advised that there should be no unnecessary delay.

While nowhere throughout the colonies was the question of separation from the mother country advocated; yet such occurrences as the burning of the Gaspee in June, 1772; and, eighteen months later, in December, 1773, the scene in Boston Harbor, when three hundred and forty chests of tea were emptied into the bay, showed clearly the temper of the people; and no one of ordinary intelligence could regard the present strained relations with other than the greatest apprehension. A rope must break somewhere during this severe storm of party spirit and intolerance, and then whither would the gallant ship be tossed? That the colonists would really be forced to take to the boat was not clearly foreseen by any one, until the bright morning sun of the nineteenth of April shone down

upon the minute-men steadily marching to the defense of Concord Bridge.

The British troops had quietly sallied forth from Boston the night before to seize the cannon and ammunition of the colonists at Concord. But their intention could not be kept secret from the vigilant and determined men who, under the orders of Warren, were watching their every movement.

The beacon-light streaming from the tower of the old North Church at Boston, the hurrying hoof beats, that were speeding William Dawes through Roxbury, and Paul Revere by way of Charleston to Lexington, carried warning to all that were along the route to Concord. Everywhere the minute-men assembled, the alarm spread and the British troops advanced.

When the sun rose and wakened the robin and the bluebird with its almost summer-like warmth, its rays sparkled on the wet grass of Lexington Common; but the answering gleam of red was reflected from no morning dewdrops. Sixteen of the sixty or seventy men, drawn up there before break of day, lay dead or wounded under the British volley fired upon them. Still the colonists had committed no open act of rebellion. A few scattered shots had been fired after their leader had called to them to disband and retire from what was merely a field of murder; but they were ineffective and not premeditated.

It was not until noon of the same morning, after the British had in vain rifled Concord in search of military stores, which had been hurriedly removed and concealed, and when the minute-men, marching to the assistance of their friends in the town, found the British hastily taking up the planks of the bridge across the Concord, while smoke was rising from the town of which the rest held possession, that the decisive moment came. Even then, excited as they were, they were still British subjects; but when a volley met their advance, and companions fell beside them, the word was given and Major John Buttrick, of Concord, turning towards them shouted:

"Fire, fellow-soldiers, for God's sake fire!"

As the sharp reports of the flint-locks rang out on the warm noonday air two British soldiers fell dead, several were wounded, and the civil war had begun.

The rest of that day, until the setting sun gleamed redly on the survivors of the British troops escaping across the Neck to Boston, was filled with the horrors of war. The Americans hurrying ahead, ambushed in small bands at every available point and picked off the British soldiers. They, in revenge, exasperated by the contest with this melting and illusive enemy burned and rifled houses, and ill-treated and murdered the helpless inmates. The troops sent out by Gage to aid the retreating party fared as badly as their com-

rades. The record of that memorable day gave eighty-eight of the Americans killed, wounded, and missing, while the much vaunted "regulars" had lost two hundred and seventy-three.

When the awful news reached Providence, an earthquake could not have more utterly transformed the whole town. Nothing else was in every mind, on every tongue.

Then, indeed, Sophy recognized the kind wisdom of Dr. Manning's resolute advice to her to let no earthly consideration hold her back from the duty to her Heavenly Lord and Master. The assured feeling that she and Penelope were indeed gathered into the Lord's earthly fold was an untold comfort and support to her in the severe anxiety and suspense in store for her; and, also, in another way she saw the risk that might be incurred by delay.

Reuben, since his illness, had been keenly alive to religious influence, and during the winter he had attended the meetings, as far as a natural shrinking from the questioning glances of old neighbors and friends would allow; but this feeling of soreness over his escapade and the sorry figure he made at his return held him back from any open avowal of his feelings. It was not until after Penelope's baptism, that he seriously spoke of his desire to unite with the church; and before he had finally decided, this over-

whelming news came to sweep for awhile all other thoughts into the background.

His whole being chafed against suspense and inaction, and his chief desire was to ride off at once under pretext of seeking for news of his uncle, and thus to push his way to the forefront of danger.

This time his mother made no effort to hold him back. The news of Lexington sweeping over the whole country as rapidly as smoking, foam-flecked steeds could travel, or beacon-lights could flash the tidings, found response not alone among those who seized flint-lock and bullet-bag, and hurried to the rendezvous at Cambridge, but it found equally brave hearts beating under the kerchief of matron and maiden, who spoke words of cheer and watched with resolute mien and prayerful resignation, as their nearest and dearest hastened to the awful risks of the battle-field.

Sophy for the moment was bewildered and crushed.

"Oh, Reuben," she cried, "you cannot leave us! Did you say the men of Chelmsford were out? Oh, I trust Nathanael is at Haverhill. You must stay with us till he comes."

But Dorothy reached him his powder-flask with hands that did not tremble, and her voice was steady as she said in low and quiet tones:

"Go, my lad. May the God of our fathers bless

and keep thee. It is the cause of justice and of right. And he will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

The strong and steady courage of the old Puritans shone in her eyes, and for the time surpassed even the daring spirit and the traditional bravery of the race of the Beatouns. But Sophy was no coward, and throughout the long and trying days that followed, she bore herself nobly. If the fire of patriotism and the love of freedom did not glow as strongly in her bosom; and if she could not, like Dorothy, have resolutely sent forth her dearest—she could and did cling with humble, childlike faith to her newly-found trust and hope, and each night as she prayed for her husband's safety, she added through her tears the petition that she might prove herself a brave and true-hearted wife.

The blow fell the most severely on Mercy. For Arthur's name flashed at once to her mind, and the terrible fear lest he should meet with Nathanael or Reuben in deadly conflict made her heart for the moment stand still. But outwardly she was as calm and as steadily self-possessed as her sister.

Sophy's hope that Nathanael was at Haverhill would really have availed little. She did not comprehend when she expressed it, how thoroughly the whole country was roused.

Before noon of the nineteenth, the news of Lexington had reached Haverhill, and men were marching out

to join their companions at Concord. And on the twentieth, bands of New Hampshire farmers were crossing Haverhill ferry, on their way to the scene of action.

Nathanael was, in fact, at Chelmsford still occupied with business relating to the sale of his farm. He had been at Haverhill and had dated thence a letter to Sophy, which she received at the time that she was preparing for her baptism. It was very short, and through it all ran the same tone of constraint, although he made no allusion to the past. Sophy had a very doleful cry over it, and then she sat down and penned a long and loving epistle telling him of the step which she and Penelope were about to take. This letter she directed to him at Mr. Hezekiah Smith's, in Haverhill, and there it was still, lying in his desk awaiting Nathanael's arrival, or some information as to where it could be forwarded to him.

Nathanael had marched out with the Chelmsford men, and through the whole of that long day his had been one of the coolest and most resolute heads. The bitterness that had rankled in his heart ever since he had learned that Sophy had been aiding in the scheme to deceive him, caused him to hail with fierce eagerness this lawful method of giving expression to the anger and keen disappointment that were hardening into sullen reserve. To Nathanael's nature, doing was much easier than enduring. He could not pre-

tend to have forgiven Donnycourt or to feel towards him anything but hatred and aversion. When this subject was mentioned at Haverhill, Mr. Smith having made such inquiries as he could without exciting curiosity, Nathanael replied shortly:

"That matter is ended. Old Goody Folinsbee, the only witness, as I understand Mercy's story, is dead; Rogers is dead; and as for the man himself—well, I have not met him yet."

"If you should meet him, you will remember whose you are and whom you serve; and you will not do devil's work to cause you life-long remorse," said Mr. Smith with quiet decision.

"I make no pretense," replied Nathanael stubbornly, as the dark blood mounted to his contracted forehead. "If that man stood before me now, I should shoot him; however much I might regret it afterwards."

"You speak your own words," replied Mr. Smith; "and you forget that you have given yourself to One who will never let his own slip out of his grasp. If the trial comes you will hear his command."

The words struck Nathanael strangely; the conversation changed, but his passion abated as he tried to grasp their full meaning. Failing in this attempt, he returned to his sullen brooding, and until the nineteenth of April dawned, Donnycourt was never long out of his thoughts.

The tumult and excitement of that memorable day, for the first time caused him to forget all private grievances, and his thoughts, or rather feelings—for in such a turmoil men had little time for thought—were wholly absorbed in the great question of the stand against oppression and tyranny.

Late in the afternoon, just before the British troops, fagged and exhausted, were met by their comrades sent from Boston to their assistance, Nathanael and several others had gained a vantage point whence they leveled their muskets at the advancing and straggling column of regulars. The Americans were good marksmen, and, as the enemy approached, the muzzle of each musket covered its man. There was a prolonged flash like forked lightning, and a succession of reports rang out. No one noticed that Nathanael's musket was silent. But when the answering shots whistled by and the smoke trailed off, his comrades, who were busily re-loading under shelter of a stone wall, saw him stoop to pick up a lock of hair that had fallen beside him.

"A close shave that, Rodman," said one of them.

"Very close," replied Nathanael as he coolly laid the lock in his pocket-book. And only himself knew that his words had a double meaning.

Just as he was about to fire the red-coated figure turned directly towards him, and under the sweat

and dust and powder grime he distinctly recognized the face of Arthur Donnycourt. This was the meeting he had often contemplated, and now the bullet might be sped in honest war and for a just cause; but this unexpected sight of the man haggard, worn, disheveled, gasping for breath, struggling for life, caused Nathanael's finger to drop from the trigger.

"I will not make a just battle an excuse for avenging private wrong," he said to himself, and when the bullet whistled through his hair—not fired by Arthur for Nathanael saw, before the smoke hid him, that he held his sword in his right hand—he saw in an instant how near he had been to ending his days in the very act of gratifying his hatred. A sudden rush of thankfulness came over him.

There was no time then to indulge in thought or feeling; but afterwards, when Nathanael looked back on that day, he found that he could no longer bring before his mind the gay, handsome young gallant, against whom his anger naturally flamed, but only the distressed and hunted fugitive, towards whom a feeling of compassion involuntarily went forth. Remembering Mr. Smith's words, he bowed his head in awe and reverently murmured:

"With God all things are possible. Merciful Father, ever guard me from myself!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

DAME TRUEFITT'S ADVICE TO JONATHAN.

THE work of gathering and forming an army now occupied the Americans, and this was no light task. For, while men came in hosts, military stores were scarce; and many of the recruits, pouring in from every side, came without guns, ammunition, or even money. But where courage and brains were abundant, the work of organization was not likely to halt for want of material.

Nathanael's time was fully occupied, but he found opportunity to write a hasty missive, which after sundry delays, found its way to the Fythe Farm and to the hands of Mistress Sophy. She wept over this letter almost as abundantly as over the preceding one; but from a different cause. These hasty lines spoke renewed confidence and love in every straggling pencil-stroke, and the enclosed lock of hair was to Sophy a more precious token than any that Nathanael had given her in the days when he had wooed and won her. This was a constant reminder, not only of earthly affection, but of the heavenly love and watch-care, that had shielded her loved one on that dreadful day.

From the tenor of this brief letter Sophy discovered that her own had not reached him, and while she was disturbed that he should have been so long without tidings of her, there was secret comfort in the thought that the words which were so grateful to her were prompted entirely by his love. Sophy's letter reached her husband soon after he had despatched his own. It was brought by Mr. Smith, who joined the army at Cambridge, and was subsequently present with the regiment of Colonel Nixon, on the memorable eighteenth of June, when the Battle of Bunker Hill taught the British what they might expect from their despised opponents. At the third Provincial Congress in July it was decided that three generals and field officers be empowered and directed to choose nine gentlemen of the clergy of this colony to act as chaplains of the army. Mr. Smith was chosen as one of the nine, "no small honor to our contemned church," wrote Nathanael to his wife in the letter in which he announced to her this fact.

The choice was a happy one, for the zealous soldier of Christ, proved himself to be no less a courageous patriot. In truth his friend and commander Colonel Nixon found it at length necessary to give him special orders, in order to hinder him from being in the front of danger when the regiment was in battle.

For a time the town of Providence was not in-

volved in the actual turmoil and horrors of war. The College continued its routine as far as possible, but it was decided to have no public Commencement. The graduating class, ten in number, was the largest that had yet graduated from the College, but the Commencement was private. The noise of war, however, did not hinder the completion of the new Meeting House. On the twenty-eighth of May it was opened for worship; and ten days later the tall and graceful spire, an addition forbidden to the meeting-houses of Dissenters in England, rose complete among the surrounding elms; and the bell, also forbidden to English Dissenters, was free to send its melodious summons over the city and across the blue waters of the Bay.

"Here we have liberty to call men to pray and praise, to listen to the message which God has entrusted to us," said Jonathan Pursell, who had come down to attend the opening service. "While there is a drop of blood in our veins we will not give up to the hand that would silence our tongues, and strike down that heavenward pointing finger."

Sophy smiled at the quaint conceit, but they all felt that he spoke the truth. Though the beginning at Concord was small, the results stretched away indefinitely into the future. In those first days of June, while in Providence the heavenward pointing spire

was being raised, in Philadelphia the Continental Congress undertook to borrow six thousand pounds—about twenty-five thousand dollars—to purchase gunpowder for the army before Boston, which had sent in vain to every colony in New England to obtain powder, and was now nearly destitute. Two weeks later this Congress took the important step of electing George Washington as Commander-in-Chief of what was now designated as the Continental Army. On the third of July Washington formally assumed the command at Cambridge and resolutely began the herculean task of reducing the mass of "people in arms," into a disciplined, well-appointed, and well-officered army.

The letters that Sophy received from Nathanael expressed great satisfaction with the new state of affairs. Reuben had succeeded in joining the Rhode Island men, and his scanty missives spoke of the high esteem in which General Greene and all the Rhode Island officers held the new commander.

Still the sore lack was powder, and one morning as Sophy was sitting wearily spinning and drawing a sadly uneven thread, because of the great heat and her own lassitude, she heard Dorothy busily rummaging in Reuben's room overhead. Presently she came down with a small keg in her hand.

"It is powder," she cried triumphantly. "I just

bethought me that Reuben warned me to be careful to let no fire come near this keg. Some of it has been used, but I will send every grain that is left to Mr. John Brown. You know General Washington has written to him, and to every one that he thinks can aid, to urge them to send on powder."

Even the smallest quantities were thankfully received and Dorothy's offering went to the army before Boston with all that could be collected in the town and the neighboring country.

Nine months of tedious waiting and training were before these brave men. But at length the morning of the fifth of March, 1776, dawned and revealed to the astonished eyes of Howe the forts that crowned the heights of Dorchester. The British General was overawed, and shortly after ordered the evacuation of the city. As Washington's little army watched the long line of transports conveying the British troops away from the shores of New England, not a man felt inclined to murmur at the long months of patient preparation.

Soon after Washington ordered part of the army to New York, and Colonel Nixon's regiment being among those sent, Mr. Hezekiah Smith, as chaplain, went to that city, stopping on his way thither at Providence, where he lodged with his old friend, Mr. Nicholas Brown, and, on the evenings of April

second and third, preached from Dr. Manning's pulpit.

To the desolate women at Fythe's Farm, it was a joy to see and hear once more their revered friend, and also to hear from his lips some tidings of their loved ones. Both Nathanael and Reuben, he assured them, were in good health and endured bravely the hardships, as well as the dangers, of their present life. They had gone on by sea with their regiments to New York, there was thus no prospect of seeing them at the Farm; but it was a comfort to meet with a friend who had seen them.

Poor Mercy during all this time, heard not a word of Donnycourt. Neither Nathanael nor Reuben ever mentioned his name in their letters. Sophy dared not to ask about him when she wrote, as her newly restored peace was too precious to her to be disturbed by indiscreet questionings. Mercy was thankful that her hands were too busy to allow much time for retrospect and surmises. Both brain and hands were called into requisition, for the sole management of both household and farm now fell upon the women, and Mercy's restored health and earnest desire to be useful and to spare Dorothy, led her to take far more than her share of the extra work.

It is true that she looked older, but her face had lost none of its sweetness, and wore a look of quiet

cheerfulness and a steadfastness of expression that led old Mother Truefitt to remark to Jonathan Pursell, when he came to Providence to be present at the Commencement in 1776:

"I wonder that a likely young man, such as you, does not take to himself a wife. A minister is in a kind of a way but one-armed till he has a good wife to help and encourage him."

"That is true," replied Jonathan with quiet good-nature; "but it would need to be some one past the common who would be willing to aid with our struggling little church, and to bear with the imperfections of its pastor too."

"I could lay my finger on the very one for you," replied Dame Truefitt; "and you need not go farther from here than the Fythe Farm to find as sober-minded and gentle spoken a wife as any man need wish for."

"Thank you; but I fear you have not picked right yet. She is growing a fine tall lass, but she is not troubling her little head with sweethearts yet; and when the time comes she will not thank you for giving her a man twice her age," and before Dame Truefitt had time to explain away the mistake, Jonathan had said "good-bye," and turned to speak to another old acquaintance.

"There's manners for you," growled Dame Truefitt

to Waitstill Crane, as she trotted homeward. "One would think to hear him talk, that yon chit of an English girl was the only young maid at the Fythe Farm. Jonathan Pursell may have learned grace of heart, but he has not learned much grace of speech over there in Connecticut."

"How do you know but what he is courting somebody down that way," replied Waitstill.

"Well, then he needn't be so close about it," returned the old woman. But the suggestion mollified her, and soon found its way about the neighborhood in a more positive form.

In truth, Jonathan still looked upon Mercy as a married woman. He had heard nothing of the matter beyond what she had confided to him. She met him with a certain degree of stiffness and constraint that he felt, though it was not noticeable to others. Mercy could not help feeling that his words to her that summer afternoon explained the real reason why he was still unmarried, while the considerate thoughtfulness of his manner towards her on the rare occasions when they met contrasted very painfully with Donnycourt's indifference and neglect.

The summer wore on until the Fourth of July, when the Congress assembled in Philadelphia issued a "Declaration" which announced the birth of the new Republic. But the reports of much sickness in

the army caused constant fear and anxiety at Fythe Farm; and in August the alarming tidings came of the defeat of the Americans on Long Island.

Soon after this their fears were relieved by a short visit from Nathanael, who had been despatched to Mr. Brown on business of importance. He brought good news of Reuben, who was in good health and well regarded by his captain for his steadiness and bravery. But he could give no encouragement to the hope that Dorothy had cherished of soon seeing her son home again. Owing to the untrained condition of most of the men who formed the army, and the hesitating policy of the Congress, where Washington's advice and urgent appeals were too often unheeded, the little army was melting away, and Reuben would not stir from his post.

"Every man who stands resolutely by our General is of value now," said Nathanael; "and I honor the boy for his decision and right feeling. There is more in him than I thought. This madcap son of yours, Dorothy, will yet become the pride of his family."

It was not in Dorothy's breast alone that these words awakened a glow of pride. If Nathanael had looked in the face of the tall, slender lassie standing before the big spinning-wheel he might have noted a glad light in the thoughtful brown eyes, and a flush of pleasure glowing in the pretty sun-burned face.

But Penelope was still at the age when she was not expected to proffer unasked-for remarks in the presence of her elders, and she twirled the wheel in silence.

Nathanael's mission brooked of no delay. He could only speak words of cheer, and then ride off again, commending the little family to the tender mercies of the One, who alone could strengthen them to meet bravely all the uncertainties of the approaching winter.

A few months later, when the December winds came roaring up the Bay, the tide of war reached their threshold. Sir Peter Parker, the British commander, with seventy men-of-war anchored in Newport harbor and took possession of the town. This occurred on Saturday, December seventh, and on the following Tuesday, President Manning dismissed the students at the College until the end of the next spring vacation; and the College building, that had been raised with such pains and supported with such devoted zeal, became the barracks for the American troops that now filled the town.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MERCY AGAIN MEETS DONNYCOURT.

MORE than three years have passed over the old Fythe Farm, and again the May sunlight is gleaming on the rippling waters of the lovely Narragansett Bay, whose restless waves, ever changing yet ever the same, form a striking contrast to the shores that they wash.

The once beautiful islands which it encircles, the towns and villages on its banks, all bear the marks of the desolating war that for three long years has burned and wasted their loveliness—as fierce and ungoverned passions will ruin the beauty of the human countenance.

The beautiful Rhode Island rises bare and bleak; only one old sycamore remains of all the wealth of forest that clothed her in sylvan loveliness; and ruined and blackened walls and desolated corn fields stand as mute witnesses of the miseries that these years of horror and of want have brought upon her people. Yet there is brightness still in some of the households where so lately famine and distress have

peered through the window, or even taken their grim stand by the hearthstone.

At the old Fythe Farm are thankful and happy hearts, as again the unbroken circle is gathered under the old roof tree. And there is even deeper feeling than the thankfulness for dangers averted and trials overpast.

Reuben has returned, not only in safety, but with the honors that Nathanael had foretold. And, most joyful tidings of all to the mother's heart, these years of turmoil and warfare during which many had forgotten the things of God, or grown neglectful of them, have led him to closer and more devout allegiance to the Great Captain. His first desire on returning to Providence was that he might be baptized, and it was with joy that the good pastor received into the church this young man, of whom he had often thought with anxiety and regret, as he earnestly strove with the coldness and indifference to spiritual things which deadened the life of the church during the years of the war.

Already, in the short breathing space that had been given them since the British evacuated Rhode Island, steps had been taken to re-open the College, and President Manning, at a meeting of the Corporation, was authorized to begin again the work of instruction. He undertook the task with the brave energy that he

had always shown in his work, although, owing to the scarcity of the times, his former slender salary of one hundred pounds was now reduced to sixty pounds —about three hundred dollars.

"Ah, times have changed since first Mr. President opened that Seminary," said Dorothy, as she fondly stroked her son's hand while he sat beside her. "I was wise in my own conceit and ready to shape the world both for myself and for others; but now I am thankful to take it as the Almighty sends it to me."

"Well, mother, you have had little comfort from me all these years; but although the future is dark enough yet, I trust with God's help, to give you cause to be proud of me for something else than fighting," said Reuben, and while he pressed his mother's hand his glance wandered to a graceful form flitting about in the twilight, on household thoughts intent, and he thought he saw an encouraging light in Penelope's dark eyes.

A figure darkening the door-way put a stop to the conversation, and Jonathan Pursell entered. It was long since he had been in Providence, and warm and eager greetings met him; but his look was thoughtful and preoccupied, and he immediately asked for a few words in private with Nathanael. They withdrew together and Mercy hastened to lay another pewter plate; for though the fare was simple and even scanty,

the hospitality of heart was unbounded. Penelope had gone out to milk and Reuben also had disappeared. Sophy helped to arrange the supper-table, while Dorothy sat in the chimney corner over the blazing sticks that were still a necessity for her rheumatic knees in the early spring evenings.

Suddenly Nathanael's face appeared at the door and he called to Sophy. Something in his tone and the slight glimpse that she caught of his grave face startled Mercy; but she quietly continued her task. She cast an apprehensive glance at the faces of the three, as they came in and took their places at the supper-table, but it told her nothing. They certainly looked graver than usual, and Sophy was so much preoccupied that her maternal eye failed to note a certain absent-minded shyness in Penelope, till she was roused by an exclamation from Dorothy as the usually deft-fingered maiden nearly cut her finger instead of the loaf of bread which stood opposite to her.

"Let me do that," said Reuben, coming to her assistance, with a subdued twinkle in his eyes, while Penelope colored furiously and gave up the knife to him with a glance half chiding, half deprecating.

But no one heeded this little by-play, and the reason for the preoccupation was not explained until they all rose from the table and Sophy gently drew

Mercy's arm through her own and carried her off up-stairs.

"Something has happened, Sophy; tell me," said Mercy, trembling in spite of her effort to retain perfect self-control. "Nathanael and Reuben are here and well. It is not . . . it cannot be——?"

"Yes, sweetheart," replied Sophy gently, "I see you have divined what I have to tell you. There is one who wishes to see you."

"To see me! Oh no, no, that cannot, cannot be!" exclaimed Mercy.

"Wait till you hear all, dear, then you shall decide," said Sophy. "He has been wounded and ill. Indeed, he is very ill now."

"Where is he?" asked Mercy in low tones, averting her face.

"Mr. Pursell accompanied him to Abner Drew's, where he now lies," replied Sophy. "You will go to him, dear?"

"Give me time to think. Do not urge me now. I will tell you in the morning," said Mercy.

Sophy could not understand this shrinking on Mercy's part. She fancied that at the thought of Arthur ill and penitent, all the old affection would have been aroused in Mercy's heart. She herself was deeply touched by Jonathan's account, and she could not put herself fully in the place of the young girl,

who had been led by her trustfulness into bitter trouble, and then had been left to bear the slow misery of feeling herself forgotten and neglected. If Arthur had quarreled with her, she would have waited and hoped always for a reconciliation; but this careless neglect, followed by the spasmodic revival of lover-like warmth in his appeal to her at Haverhill, and the subsequent relapse into indifference had cut at the very root of her love. She saw the surprise in Sophy's face, and suddenly exclaimed passionately:

"Oh, can you not see? He never cared for me. I was only a pretty woman who took his fancy. And I, who thought that we could help and raise each other! Oh, Sophy, it degrades me in my own eyes, that I should ever have attracted him!" She broke down and wept bitterly.

Sophy vainly tried to soothe her. At last Mercy with an effort recovered herself, and said wearily:

"I should not give way. I thought I had trained myself to more control. Forget what I have said. I will give you an answer in the morning."

"Jonathan Pursell does not think that he will live till morning," replied Sophy.

She had feared to say this sooner; but now she saw that it must be told; and she even thought rather bitterly that it might be a relief to Mercy to know it. Sophy could not forget the bright, boyish companion

of her girlhood. She had older memories, and besides she had none of the recent wrongs that filled Mercy's mind. But she was again surprised as Mercy exclaimed, in awe-stricken tones:

"What! Oh, Sophy, may God forgive me if I have delayed too long! Quick, dear, help me to get ready. If I could say one word to bring peace to his soul! He will listen now, and not think of me. But have I delayed too long?"

Her impatience was almost feverish, and she could hardly listen to Sophy's assurance that she had really caused no delay.

Jonathan's horse was tied ready saddled at the door; he offered it to Nathanael. It took but little time to adjust the pillion, and soon Nathanael and Mercy were cantering rapidly away through the deepening twilight, while Jonathan, sad at heart and too restless to remain with his friends, walked slowly after.

Jonathan had not told them that Arthur was wounded in one of those attacks made by the British on the houses and villages of the mainland, when houses were wantonly pillaged and burned, without even the excuse of advancing the actual warfare. His health had been already severely affected by the terrible cold of the winter of 1778, 1779. During that winter occurred the frightful storm known through-

out Rhode Island as "the Hessian storm" because so many of these foreigners, hired to fight for the British, perished in it. Guards were frozen at their posts; neither man nor beast could stand against the blinding, suffocating snow that filled the air and blocked the roads.

Donnycourt had never been wont to pay much heed to health; and the effect of a comparatively slight wound coming after the sufferings of that winter was such as to throw him into a fever, in which his life was despaired of; and when the British troops evacuated the Island he lay at the point of death in the house of one of his Tory friends.

Through all the fevered fancies of delirium, he was haunted with the thought of Mercy; and when at last he recovered sufficiently to drag himself out into the sunlight, he determined before making an attempt to get sick leave and to return to England, that he would see her and make what reparation he could.

"Heaven only knows if I shall ever live to reach England; and I would rather she had my share of the Donnycourt property than that cub William," he thought bitterly. "If she still has that certificate of marriage that Rogers wrote out, I believe we can manage it; for Goody Folinsbee said, the lines, as she called it, given by the blacksmith at Gretna Green, would stand in any law court. Or else she shall get

her own parson to go over the ceremony again. She need not be afraid; for she would soon be left a tolerably wealthy widow."

With this intention he left Newport, assuming for safety a civilian dress. He did not care to show himself in Providence at the risk of being recognized, so he hired a small boat that landed him near Gaspee Point. His friends had remonstrated with him, but he acted with his usual willful disregard of consequences. He would not confide to any one his reasons for going to Providence, and turned aside all anxious warnings concerning his health with a jest. He intended to go on foot from Gaspee Point to the Fythe Farm, but the exposure in the boat had brought on a severe attack of the rheumatism to which he had become subject, and he got shelter for the night at a house where he was kindly received, but fearing lest he should fall seriously ill among strangers, he continued his journey as soon as he found himself relieved from acute pain.

He soon found that his strength was gone and he could find no means of conveyance. He was in this sorry plight when he fell in with Jonathan Pursell, and in utter desperation he made himself known to him, and begged Jonathan to find him a safe lodging.

Even in that sore strait it was not without a slight satisfaction, that he asked this rival suitor for Mercy's

hand to make known to her his desire to see her. But the satisfaction was short-lived; a feeling of compunction and shame came over him as he saw Jonathan with quiet resolution depart upon his errand. Then followed painful doubts as to whether Mercy would come; and these increased as again severe pain racked his weakened frame.

Kitty Drew, an old friend of Jonathan's mother, did what she could for him. But the quiet and religious old woman was half afraid of his impatience, and wholly shocked at the profanity which, from habit, escaped his lips, in his suffering, though he would willingly have avoided anything that was likely to excite annoyance or remark.

Kitty was sufficiently skilled in doctoring to see that the rheumatism, which he looked upon as the least dangerous ailment, was in fact liable at any moment to reach the heart, and she longed for Jonathan's return, that he might fetch a doctor, or at least be with his friend at the end which she felt sure was rapidly approaching.

When at length hoof beats were distinctly heard, and a few minutes later Mercy herself entered the room, Arthur was suffering so greatly that he could not get breath to speak. Mercy had been trembling with agitation the moment before, and Nathanael feared she would be unable to bear the sight before

her. But her self-control returned as soon as she forgot herself.

Motioning to Nathanael to remain out of sight, Mercy took from Kitty's hand the potion that she had prepared for Donnycourt, and herself held it to his lips. Then as he grew easier she whispered to Kitty; and the old woman, satisfied that her lodger had found friends, and well used to seeing Mercy, wherever there was distress or illness, left the room.

All the prearranged speeches which Arthur had intended to address to Mercy failed him, and he could only in short and stammering sentences express his wishes. But, when he began to speak of his property, an ominous flush mounted to the very roots of Mercy's hair, and she turned upon him such a pained and appealing look that he stopped and left the sentence unfinished.

"I thought you might need it—at least you ought to have it," he said after a few seconds of silence, in which she was too much hurt to speak. "And besides," he continued, with the irritation of a child not used to being crossed, "I must do something. You are an angel, and I—well, I deserved to be shot. Let me do something for you, Mercy, just to show that you forgive me."

"I do forgive you, as fully and freely as I hope to be forgiven," replied Mercy in low thrilling tones.

"But the kindest thing you can do for me is to forget me entirely now. Your future troubles me far more than my own."

He looked in faint surprise at the gentle tear-dimmed eyes gazing so sadly at him.

"Ah, it is too late for that," he said shortly. "I might have done better, but I took my choice, and must make the best of it. Do not trouble your kind heart about me. I hope I shall not prove a coward when the end comes, be it far, or be it near."

The only reply that Mercy made was to bow her head, and, with trembling lips, begin a fervent prayer to the One who alone can rescue the soul from the toils of the Evil One. Nathanael listened with awe to her simple, earnest words. She who was generally so shrinking and timid about expressing her religious feelings, seemed now to have entirely forgotten herself; and even the slight trembling in her voice was soon steadied in her earnest appeal. But when she prayed that the effect of her fault might not stand as a bar between this soul and the Divine Mercy her voice shook again. Donnycourt dared not interrupt her; the protest he would have uttered died on his lips. He dimly understood that nothing but the assurance that his soul was safe would bring relief and comfort to her. For a moment a strange feeling came over him. He was almost jealous of his own soul, this

part of him for which Mercy cared so deeply, and of which he had thought so little, in those days of health and gayety when his chief care was the amusement, and the adornment, and the comfort of the handsome figure, that was to him an inseparable part of Arthur Donnycourt. While he was inwardly pitying this wrecked and shattered body, she scarcely seemed to give it a thought. Still he could not be otherwise than touched by her intense earnestness; and it was in no careless, or scoffing tone he said:

"Do you believe in death-bed repentance? It always seemed to me a cowardly attempt to shirk the consequences of one's misdeeds."

"Yet you sent for me," said Mercy. "And you have not injured me half as deeply as you have sinned against the Saviour who shed his blood to redeem you."

The latter part of her words was to him a mere religious phrase, but the logic of the first part struck him.

"Yes, you are right," he said after a moment's thought, "and I can truly say that I am sorry for a great deal that is past; and if I get up again I will try to do better. That must satisfy you and set your heart at rest. I am not worth troubling about," and he smiled half sadly.

"The Saviour did not say that. To him, you were

worth dying for," said Mercy simply, and again Donnycourt had no answer to make.

"What would you have me do?" he asked at last half petulantly.

"I would have you give to him the soul for which he has paid such a price," she answered with reverent awe. "That you did not give it sooner is no reason that you should defraud him forever."

For the first time Donnycourt felt his assured courage, as he called it, failing him. The picture her words presented to him, of himself as defrauding One who had bought him with his life, was not as satisfactory to him as his own view of himself as a man who had gone wrong, but was too courageous and just to try to shirk the consequences. He fought it off. He wanted to be angry with Mercy, but this gentle earnest woman was not speaking with intention to pain him; she only expressed her own strong conviction as simply and anxiously as she might have told him that he would never be able to undertake the voyage to England.

"What can I do?" he asked again restlessly.

"Oh, ask that of Jesus," said Mercy earnestly. "He will give you the answer."

"I cannot. You will ask for me," he replied wearily. It was the same spirit that led the boy Arthur always to come to Sophy to help him out of

his wrong-doing and troubles; but Mercy, who did not know him so thoroughly, could not divine this, and again she knelt in fervent, simple prayer.

Who can limit the power of such prayers? There was a gleam of moisture in the restless eyes as he said:

"Thank you."

Then another paroxysm of pain stopped all conversation. When it passed off he lay for a time exhausted; then he suddenly asked:

"Are you here alone?"

"No," replied Mercy, "my brother brought me."

"Rodman?" said Arthur; "I would like to see him."

At a sign from Mercy, Nathanael advanced and Arthur smiled faintly as he tried to hold out his hand.

"Nearly gone!" he whispered. "Don't think too badly of me, Rodman. I've tried to make the amend, but she cares for nothing, but my soul, that, alas, I know little about."

Nathanael, like many a strong man brought face to face with the wreck of health, and gayety, and beauty, was overcome, and could not command his voice to reply, and Arthur continued:

"I wish you would give my trinkets to Sophy. Except this, it was my mother's, will you take it?"

and he looked wistfully at Mercy, as he indicated a ring on his finger with hair set in pearls. "Take it off, and give it to her. I want to see her take it," he added, as Mercy bowed her head afraid to trust her voice; and Nathanael did as he requested. "I wish that I had left my property to Sophy, but it is too late for that now. I am always too late to do any good it seems."

"Not too late to accept the Saviour's love," said Nathanael, making an effort to speak as he saw Mercy looking piteously at him.

"Do you really think that?" he said, turning again toward Mercy with wistful eyes. He seemed afraid that she might leave him, and he whispered other words that she could not catch, but she answered with steady and unfaltering tones:

"I am sure of it, if you will only trust in Jesus."

His breath began to come in heavy gasps; Nathanael pushed her gently back.

"Go now, my child," he said; and Mercy, feeling her strength giving way, obeyed him. As she left the bedside, she caught in faint tones the words of the Litany, "Lord, have mercy on me," and she left the room to weep and pray. While thus engaged a little later she felt Nathanael's hand on her shoulder, and saw his grave face bending over her, as he said:

"Come, dear; there is no more for us to do here."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MERCY FINDS HER LIFE WORK.

IT was at the old Fythe Farm and by those to whom he had caused the bitterest suffering, that Donnycourt's memory was most truly and tenderly respected. Even Dorothy to whom the whole sad story was told by Mercy, though she was shocked and sorely distressed, spoke no word of blame either of the living or the dead, and warm-hearted Sophy shed bitter tears when the merry companion of her girlish days was borne to his last resting place in the North Burying Ground. The days following that sad evening in May wore on for Mercy in a strange awed stillness that she could hardly understand. Once when they were alone together she looked with wistful glance at Sophy's tearful eyes, and whispered:

"Don't think hardly of me, dear, that I cannot weep. God has been merciful to us, and has given me comfort that I never dared to hope for; but oh, how different it might have been!"

Sophy's lips trembled and she could not trust her voice to reply. The look of patient endurance in Mercy's eyes, touched her more deeply than any

amount of tears. And in her own heart she knew that although at times she had been inclined to resent Mercy's calmness, any demonstrative grief would have appeared to her hypocritical.

Mercy herself had neither the strength nor the wish to keep up appearances. That last meeting with Donnycourt had drawn out the sting that had rankled in her heart, but it seemed to her that all her feelings either of joy or sorrow were deadened. She was like a helpless, wandering child, who can only cling closely to the guiding hand that is leading it through the darkness. Whither it was leading her, she hardly asked, but she sometimes imagined that this strange lull of feeling must mean that her life work was ended, and her hold on this world was being loosened; and she went about her daily duties with a quiet resignation of all will of her own that was restful, yet seemed almost strange to her.

The one who suffered the most deeply at this time was Jonathan Pursell. His sensitive conscience made it no easy matter for him to be satisfied with his conduct and feelings towards Donnycourt; and he had not the slightest clue to enable him to understand what effect this sad ending of her love would have upon Mercy. He only saw that while going about as usual, she seemed to be separated from all the earthly interests and duties in which she still took her part;

and he rode away to his church in Connecticut with a heavy presentiment that he had seen her for the last time.

But our life work is rarely ended when we think it is. Sometimes we are ready to lay down our finished work, and the Master puts a new task before us; sometimes we are eagerly beginning some work and the Master takes it from us saying, "Not yet."

Thus it is ofttimes in the life of individuals, and thus it was with the College, in which Dr. Manning was busily reorganizing the course of study. On Sunday, June 25, while he was preaching in the Meeting House, the College Building was again seized by order of the council of war; but this time it was to be used as a hospital for the French troops. The ladies of the town were soon busied in preparing bandages and other necessaries, for the sick and wounded. Mercy was too well known as a valuable helper not to be called upon to aid in this work; and in her own home, life still went on, bringing its joys and sorrows. Thus, even while it seemed to her that her own life was ended, Mercy found herself insensibly waking up to her usual interest and sympathy in the hopes and fears of those dear to her.

On the very evening when it seemed to her as if the story of her life had ended by Arthur's death-bed, Reuben had won from Penelope the answer that made

the world open with rosy brightness before him; and, although in the sudden gloom cast over the household by the tidings of Donnycourt's death, Penelope had forbidden Reuben to speak to her father, the daughter's heart was not a sealed book to the mother, and Sophy knew that Nathanael's approval would not be hard to gain.

Sophy shrank from telling Mercy of this, but to Penelope and Reuben, who knew nothing of the relations between Donnycourt and their dear aunt, it would have been strange indeed not to confide in Aunt Mercy and claim her sympathy and help.

Therefore when the matter was properly and formally settled, it was she who was called upon by Reuben to aid him in his petition that the marriage should not be long postponed. And it was to her that Penelope brought the trivially important question about the preparing of her modest outfit. Dorothy and Sophy soon followed in the way prepared for them by the young people; and called upon her as of old to help in settling doubtful matters and in accomplishing the work that filled their hands.

When Mercy also urged it, Reuben had without difficulty succeeded in gaining the consent of all that the marriage should take place in September. There was to be no change in the household, for no one would listen to any plan from Nathanael concerning

another home for himself and Sophy; and indeed he saw clearly that, in the present impoverished condition of the country, it was only by combining their slender means that the farm could be worked to any advantage.

The marriage was a very quiet one, and it was Mercy who did the most to add all the brightness that their scanty resources would allow. She decked the little parlor in which Dr. Manning was to perform the ceremony; she spread the table; and it was she who had a pleasant word for every one and was at every one's beck and call.

Jonathan Pursell was not able to be present, but he received accounts of the day from various sources, and all that he heard served to lighten in a degree the depression of his own heart. At least Mercy was not holding aloof from the joys of others, and he began timidly to ask himself whether it would be utterly impossible that she, who could thus make brightness in the lives of others, might yet receive a degree of brightness in her own.

The hope was a very faint one, but it was sufficient to impel him to make another visit to Providence as soon as he could possibly arrange it. He could only stay two days, and he did not see the newly married pair, whom he had ostensibly called to congratulate, for they were absent on a wedding jaunt to visit the

dear friends at Haverhill; nor did he say one word to Mercy of his newly awakened hope.

They talked of the prospects of Reuben and his wife, of the sad condition of the country, of Jonathan's own work, but he returned to his post, carrying a lighter heart under the cloudy November skies, than he had borne when the air was full of the brightness and perfume of May.

It was no easy work to which Jonathan returned; for religious interest had been at a very low ebb, while the tide of war swept over the land. Some of his best friends and helpers had fallen on the battle-field; others who might have filled their places, were grown careless and indifferent; and poverty and sorrow had laid sore burdens upon those who were eager to support their minister in his efforts for the welfare of the church. Of all this, however, he said very little in his visit to his friends at the Fythe Farm. It was only through others that they learned of the trials with which Jonathan had to contend.

Mr. Smith, at the urgent request of his church that he would return from the army to his charge as soon as he could do so with honor, had resigned his chaplaincy and reached Haverhill in the latter part of October. Thus Reuben and Penelope had the pleasure of seeing him and of hearing his first sermon on the Sunday after his return. He preached from the

appropriate text: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." Isaiah liv. 7. All that Reuben and Penelope could tell of Mr. Smith's deeds and words was eagerly listened to on their return to the Fythe Farm. Among other things Penelope one day mentioned:

"Mr. Smith says, that he met a Connecticut soldier who spoke with much respect of Elder Pursell. The man confessed with much contrition that he had been the instigator of much abuse of Mr. Pursell, which he had borne with wonderful patience. The poor man was at the time lying very ill in the hospital. He had been led to see the error of his ways, and he was anxious to make known to Mr. Pursell his repentance and his trust that he had truly experienced a change of heart. Mr. Smith promised him that he would convey the message, but he had been so pressed with affairs, both public and private, that he only had time to write to Mr. Pursell just before we left."

The talk flowed on in other channels, but a new thought had been presented to Mercy's mind, and she was herself surprised at the indignant pain it gave her to think of Jonathan being subjected to rude abuse.

She strove to dismiss it from her thoughts, for it was a thing of the past, and the man was penitent; but not long afterwards she overheard a remark addressed to Dorothy by Mrs. Manning.

"My husband feels a deep interest in Mr. Pursell. He is working so bravely and uncomplainingly. In a letter received from him last week, he speaks of the serious illness of old Mrs. Wells, a member of his church, who has been to him a truly Christian helper. He says that at her age it is not likely that she can recover. He will feel her loss grievously, for there is at present great lack of sympathy and Christian spirit among his people."

They were walking home from church and Mercy was a few steps behind them and not taking part in the conversation, but, at these words, she felt again strong pity and pain as she thought of the lonely worker. It seemed as though the painful subject was often brought before her mind, though perhaps it was not because people talked much of Jonathan, but because her ears were quick to catch any reference to him.

Old Dame Truefitt one day remarked bluntly enough:

"Jonathan Pursell needs a good wife to help him. I always say, if there is any one who needs a home and a kind woman in it to keep up his heart, it is a minister."

Although the snow was whirling outside the windows a flash of memory brought vividly before Mercy's mind a hot August day and certain words spoken then.

"His respect for me must have been shaken past repair; but he is too faithful to turn to any other, and he prefers this lonely life," thought Mercy with a hot flush of pain; and after this she began to feel keenly that nothing in this world can be said to be ended, and that the consequences of her action were still working themselves out.

It was not the sharp misery she had suffered before, but it was painful to feel that she had spoiled the happiness of a good man's life; and, deep down in her inmost heart, she found that not this alone caused her pain, but that she depended much upon Jonathan's delicately expressed sympathy and quiet devotion.

"I have taken it all in my selfish thoughtlessness, and never once considered that he was giving me all and asking nothing. If he could drop me entirely out of his thought, he would surely find a good and noble woman to be his wife."

From that time a subtle change came over Mercy. She was again living and fighting in a world of her own, not merely sympathizing in the hopes and fears of others. Her thoughts anticipated Jonathan Pursell's next visit, and were engaged in planning how she should make him understand that she hoped to see him happily married. But here her thoughts became a confused and perplexing jumble.

She had time enough to think and plan in every

conceivable way, for it was not until the buds were swelling on the delicate twigs that Jonathan's horse again stopped at the Fythe Farm.

If Mercy had been ten years younger, her nervousness would have shown itself probably in sundry mishaps; but now it was just a quiet and self-repressed woman who greeted her friend with commonplace words of welcome. Nathanael and Reuben were out in the fields. Penelope and Dorothy were up-stairs, occupied with the weekly basket of mending, and Sophy after a few words excused herself to go and call them.

Now was Mercy's opportunity, the time she had looked forward to—but what could she say? Only a few inquiries concerning his work came to her lips, then suddenly as she was seeking for words she found that Jonathan too had felt this was his opportunity and he was at no loss for words. What was he saying? Was she listening again to his eager speech in the arbor? Again a hot rush of shame mantled in her face, but there was no anger, only bitter pain in her tone as she replied hurriedly:

"Mr. Pursell, I thank you for enabling me to say what I have been wishing to tell you. I cannot but feel that I must have forfeited your esteem. I know your goodness, your compassion, prompt you to think kindly of me, but"—her face was burning and her

eyes began to fill with tears, she continued hastily with a great effort, "I must not spoil your life, as I have my own. You will find some one I trust——"

Was her voice going to fail her just now? When she knew the words, could she not get breath to speak them? Her hands were clasping and unclasping nervously, and a mist gathered before her eyes as she made a great effort at self-control. Suddenly her cold and trembling fingers were taken in a strong grasp, and Jonathan's voice spoke in a low tone of thankful reverence that startled her by its depth of feeling.

"Spoil my life! You, who have unwittingly helped me all these years! Ah, it is I who offer you a life of trials and discouragements! But it is the Master's work."

Steps were heard approaching on the stairs; he paused and his eyes eagerly scanned her face. What he read there was no denial, and he added earnestly:

"May God make me worthy of the blessing he has given me!"

He bent his head and kissed her hands; then, gently releasing them, he stepped forward to greet Dorothy and Penelope, who were just entering.

Mercy's first feeling was intense gratitude to him for having thus restrained himself and helped her to regain her composure. Then the full meaning of his

words came upon her with a feeling of peace and relief that surprised her; and then came a tardy dread that he had not understood her, or that some explanation must be made; for surely she could not have accepted him at the very time that she was telling him to forget her!

But the opportunity for this explanation never came. Jonathan evidently considered the matter settled, and he only pressed for a speedy marriage. In this he was supported by Dorothy and Sophy, who felt that the period of betrothal and the inevitable idle gossip of neighbors and acquaintances would be very trying for Mercy. Their own shrinking from the parting was kept in the background by their loving thoughtfulness for her, and Mercy with thankful appreciation of their motives quietly acquiesced in their plans for no unnecessary delay.

The marriage was very quiet, and Jonathan directly afterwards took his bride home. In the quiet but arduous life of the wife of a country minister Mercy's love and faith gained ever-increasing strength. While Jonathan learned to value more highly with each returning year the happiness that at one time seemed entirely out of his reach.

As years sped on, Penelope, looking with loving pride on the sturdy sons and fair daughters that gathered around her knee, sometimes heaved a regretful

sigh as she thought of Aunt Mercy's childless home. But those who lived near her and saw her every-day life, would hardly say that there was any lack of children in that home; for there was not a child in the village, who did not, shyly or boldly, according to its nature, find its way to Mistress Pursell's neat kitchen. Nor was it only the children who felt the influence of her gentle, loving ways. The anxious and hard-worked mothers, overwhelmed with household cares, soon learned to depend on the ready sympathy of the minister's wife, who never seemed to be too busy to carry to them help and comfort, or too much preoccupied with her own trials to have a word of cheer and heavenly consolation for the weary and heavy laden.

THE END.